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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"I ALWAYS WANT YOU, NAN," HE SAID, GENTLY CLASPING HER HAND

THREE YOUNG MAIDS.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"There were three young maids of Lee, They were as fair as fair could be."

"It's ridiculous!" exclaimed Nan Templemore. "Here we are, the three prettiest girls in or about Brighthelm, and not one of us is married, or engaged, or even has a lover, not even an undeclared one. A mere dangler. It's disgraceful!" and she raised her blue eyes to the ceiling with an air of mock horror that was very comical, and made both her sisters laugh.

"You forget how poor we are," said fair-haired Joan, still laughing.

"No I don't," retorted Nan, with more favour than politeness. "Nor that other girls just as poor get a chance of entering the 'holy estate.'"

"They have probably chances and opportunities that we lack," observed Barbara, the eldest of the three, with her usual gravity of manner.

"What opportunities, Bab?" cried Nan, eagerly. "Pray, explain!"

"Well-to-do aunts, uncles or cousins," put in Joan, a twinkle in her saucy eyes, "eh, Bab?"

"I should think so," rejoined Miss Templemore promptly. "People who ask them to visit at their country houses, or give them a season now and again in town, where they have chances of meeting eligible men."

"I observe you don't say young men," remarked Nan, looking at her sister, a twinkle similar to that of Joan's eyes in her own.

"No, I said men. It does not follow because a man is old or elderly that he's not eligible for matrimony."

"Certainly not; and some day, Bab, we shall see you assisting to the altar some snuffy, tottering, bald-headed old gentleman, with an abnor-

mally high collar and gold-rimmed spectacles, but whose pockets will be well lined with the 'mammon of unrighteousness.'"

"You would, no doubt, if I had the chance of meeting such an one. But," and Bab sighed mournfully, "I shall never have it."

"Don't be so cast down," said Joan, encouragingly. "Nan or I may attract the attention of some penniless curate at one of the many churches we attend, or Charlie may introduce us to a briefless barrister, then your fortune will be made, though not ours."

"How!"

"We can ask you on a visit, and give a dinner after hunting up all the old fogies we know. Then you can get the much-to-be-desired octogenarian up in a corner, and tell him how clever you are at making mustard-plasters and oatmeal gruel, and other things necessary for the aged and infirm."

"I was not aware that penniless curates or briefless barristers could give dinner parties," replied Miss Templemore, with mild sarcasm.

"We'd manage it somehow, you may be quite sure. Even if we went without dinner ourselves for a week, and had to content ourselves with a scratch meal of eggs and radishes. It would be in a noble cause, and we would make martyrs of ourselves willingly."

"Whom do you mean by 'we'?" questioned Barbara, gravely.

"Husband and self," replied Joan, briefly.

"Self might be martyred in the cause, doubt if husband would."

"Remember, I mean to marry for love."

"And so do I," cried lively Nan.

"You should add, my dears, 'if we can.'"

"Of course that goes without saying."

"Still, allowing that the curate and barrister are duly caught and married, I doubt, even the love being admitted and genuine, their sacrificing themselves on account of a sister-in-law, who will doubtless, by the time that great event takes place, be an old frump."

"Why, Bab, you are only twenty-three!"

"Well!"

The calm, brown eyes met the sparkling blue eyes questioningly.

"You won't be an old frump for years!"

"In ten, I shall be going down the hill of youth, rapidly retreating from all that is fair and fascinating. At thirty-four I shall be a middle-aged woman!"

There was conviction in the speaker's tone and manner, and the younger sisters, looking at her, were fain to acknowledge that there might be truth in what she said.

Barbara was shorter than they were, and inclined to *embonpoint*. Her face was handsome, but cold in type, and gave promise of becoming heavy-looking as the years wore on. Her hair was a deep, dead brown; her skin absolutely colourless, though there was no suggestion of ill-health about the perfectly white complexion; while her straight black brows and firm mouth gave character and decision to a countenance that somehow or other looked as if it had never been very young or child-like.

Perhaps her early life and varied and hard experiences had left an indelible mark on it.

Before she was nine her mother died, leaving baby Nan, little over a year old, to her charge, Joan four, and Charlie six.

Though Major Templemore was alive, and present at the death-bed scene, his unhappy wife never thought of leaving her babies to his tender mercies.

She knew the hard, shallow, selfish nature too thoroughly to intrust the welfare of her little helpless children to his care. So it was to Barbara, self-contained, sedate, womanish Barbara, that the fast glazing eyes turned with an imploring look of anguish in their dim depths, and it was Barbara who promised to look after her little brother and sisters, and try and be a mother to them.

Faithfully she fulfilled the promise given to the dying woman.

Strenuously she atone, child as she was, to do all that she could for them, all that was necessary for their happiness and welfare.

Before she was fifteen she made all the girl's dresses, patched the boy's clothes, taught them a little with the help of a cheap daily governess, and managed, at the same time, as her father's house, and tried to make a sovereign go as far as five—for that was what that unreasonable mortal expected her to do.

Soon after his wife's death Major Templemore left the Army, and settled down in the Red House at Brathwaite, a place left to him for his life by an uncle, and fortunately entailed to his only son Charlie, or else it would have been sold, and his children left homeless.

Here, in the big red house, with its shady garden, on the outskirts of Brathwaite, he managed to live on his pension, given him for a nasty wound received in the Crimean war. Grumbling and growling at his offspring continually, and exulting not at all how they fared so long as he was comfortable and had what he wanted.

His old instincts and likings remained—those he had been able to gratify when a rich man, before he squandered the fortune left him by his parents; and his only aim and object in life was

to have tasty dinners served at seven o'clock, with a flask of good wine; to hunt whenever he could, for following the red roger was a passion with him, and one he gratified by hook or by crook; and, being outside the walls of his own home, like many another Irishman, no end of a good fellow, a pleasant, lively companion, generally had a mount offered him two or three times a week, for some of the rich men in the neighbourhood liked the dulness of the greater part of their guests relieved by the flashes of his brilliant wit and sparkling conversation, and racy anecdotes, told with point and humour.

Another pastime he indulged in was fishing, and Barbara regarded this sport with kinder eyes, as he provided choice morsels for his own table, and saved the housekeeping expenditure by bringing home two or three brace of speckled trout, a jack, bream, and sometimes salmon.

As to hunting, she detested it, for the Major always followed in the orthodox pink, and tops and tights, and as it fell to her lot to clean and prepare his hunting clothes, and as he swore at her roundly if they were not as spick and span as if turned out by a first-class valet, it was hardly to be wondered at that she hated November to arrive, and was glad when April came with its perfume of violets, that made it difficult for soot to lie, and hunting was over.

Moreover, it entailed numerous little expenses that they could ill afford, and when there was no money to pay the butcher's, baker's, and candlestick maker's bills, in consequence thereof, it was she who had to face the infuriated and long-suffering tradespeople, and quiet them as best she could until the next quarter came round, and her amiable parent reluctantly doled out a scanty portion of the not very large pension, reserving the lion's share for himself and his selfish pleasures, concerning himself not at all that Nan's toes were sticking through her shoes, that Joan's petticoats were half way up her legs by reason of her rapid growth, and the length of time which elapsed between her receiving new frocks, that Charlie was out at elbows and knees, altogether ragamuffin in appearance, totally unfit to go to the large, cheap, semi-public school the town boasted, where a good education might be had for a ridiculously small sum per annum.

As to her own wants Barbara was silent. She never asked for anything for herself, yet it was wonderful how neat she always looked in a plain black dress, and a clean collar, the former of which she protected with a huge white linen apron similar to those worn by hospital nurses, seldom removing it save at meal times, and as she washed them along with several of her own and her sisters' things, it was hardly an extravagance.

Taking all this into consideration, what wonder was it that Barbara Templemore at twenty-three felt old, and knew she would be middle-aged and frumpish in appearance while still young? Such a childhood as hers, such a hard nightmare of difficulties and disagreeables, was bound to make her old before her time, to drive all romance and sentimentality out of her nature, leaving her common-place, calculating, and prosaic.

Both her sisters were romantic to the tips of their fingers, and pretty enough to warrant the belief that romance would form part of their lives. They were tall and slenderly built, and carried themselves easily and gracefully. Both had blue eyes and fair hair, only Joan's head was not so pretty as Nan's. Through the latter's curly, rebellious locks ran a shade of red gold, that made it gleam with a metallic lustre when the sun shone on it. Her eyes were of a deeper darker blue, her colouring deeper and richer, and though Joan's features were almost classically regular, and hers were not, she was out and away the prettier of the two, having a piquant, fascinating way about her that was irresistibly charming and attractive.

Still their good looks were of little use to them. Their father did not encourage callers, and refused all invitations for them, which some of the county and town folk in play sent; even if he had not done so, it is doubtful if they could have accepted them, having nothing appropriate to wear. It was just as much as they could do to turn out on a Sunday morning for church neatly and becomingly attired, and, as a

rule, on week-days they went for country walks or lounged in the great shady garden, which, surrounded by a high, red wall, effectually shut out prying glances, and where they helped Barbara to rear and cultivate the beautiful blooms, which, by sending up to London, she managed to make a little money out of, while the girls looked upon as their own private property, and spent in supplementing the scanty sum their father gave them to dress on and as pocket-money.

The officers of the regiment stationed at Brathwaite Major Templemore never dreamt of inviting across his threshold, though he was not backward in accepting an invitation to mess on guest nights; but as they were only a line regiment, and most of the officers poor, he thought it would be useless to waste any civility on them as they could not offer him a mount, and had no trout streams or salmon rivers to offer for his sport and pastime.

Nevertheless, some of the subalterns gave rather pointed hints that an introduction to his pretty daughters, and leave to play tennis within the precincts of the high red walls, would be very acceptable and pleasant to them.

To these and similar hints, Terrence Templemore turned a deaf ear. He had no intention of wasting his rare goodness on a set of poor "snobs," not he, indeed. He concentrated his efforts on a dinner that he gave once a year at the end of the hunting season, when he asked ten or a dozen of his especial chums to the big red house, gave the local confectioner and wine merchant a *carte blanche*, and regaled his friends with a bachelor dinner, perfect in every respect, with choice wines and choice dishes, hot-house flowers and foreign fruits, and while he and his friends gorged in the dining-room, amid the relics of bygone splendour, that had appertained to his deceased uncle, his four children drank weak tea and sky-blue milk, and ate dry bread in the bare, sparsely furnished schoolroom, where the black oak boards were guiltless of rug or carpet, the curtains and hangings old and faded, and the furniture worn and dilapidated.

Still they were merry and glad over their frugal meal, as young things should be, and grudged not their father his devilish kidneys, *foie gras*, muscat grapes, and comet claret, purchased at the cost of their dinners for many a long day to come.

"Perhaps you will marry," suggested Joan, doubtfully, after a long pause, during which she had studied her sister's charms, and appraised their value mentally. "This—"

"Saucily old man, you always say would suit you," broke in the irrepressible Nan, "and be a matron long before we get a chance of saying 'yes' to a young one."

"Perhaps, just possible, not probable," replied Barbara, calmly stitching away vigorously at an old jacket which she was trying with deft and skilful fingers to manufacture into a new one. "There is more chance of my being an untouched negative, and pining in single blessedness all my life."

"Not if we can help it!" cried her sisters simultaneously.

"But you can't help it, dears!" she responded, with an altogether exasperating coolness and nonchalance, giving a little wise nod of the brown head. "That's just it. You can't help yourselves, much less me, who am older and plainer."

"There is plenty of time for me to try," cried Nan. "I am not seventeen until next May."

"You, of course, are little more than a child," continued Miss Templemore, smoothly. "You can't expect your chances to come for another couple of years."

"Not in fact till your elders are out of the way," smiled Joan. "Remember, please that I was nineteen at Christmas."

"It is well you remind me of the fact," retorted the baby of the family, "for in that disgracefully short frock you look like a school-girl," and she gazed with great scorn at the shabby black frock Joan wore, a remnant from her girlish days, donned in the house to give a better one.



"My misfortune, not my fault," grimaced the other as she promissed round, and sent her short skirts up with a twist and a twist. "When you are a Countess you can remember your poor sisters, give us 'outdoor' relief, send down a few of your cast-off smart gowns."

"I mean at least to be a duchess!" laughed Nan, tossing back her ruddy, gold-tressed head. "Nothing short of a strawberry-leaf coronet and a duke will do for me!"

"Won't a colonel suit you?" said a voice in the doorway; and turning with an exclamation of surprise, she saw Charlie.

The next moment she was in his arms, hugging and kissing him with all a child's abandonment and glee, for they were all very fond of the brother who promised to be their salvation; for, instead of following in his father's steps, and being wild, and fast, and good-for-nothing, he was working steadily in a lawyer's office, and for the past year had been bringing a little grist to the mill.

"You're home early, Charley, aren't you?" said Barbara, as he kissed her, lifting her head for a moment to receive the caress, and then going on with her work, eager to catch the last faint rays of light, for the short winter's day was rapidly drawing to a close.

"Yes, a little. We weren't quite so busy today as usual."

"Any news?" asked Joan.

"What did you mean about a colonel?" queried Nan, simultaneously, seizing hold of the lapel of his coat, and compelling his attention.

"Do you very much want to know?" he asked, smiling down fondly into the pretty, eager up-raised face.

"To be sure I do," she responded promptly, giving the coat a little tug. "Colonels are not like blackberries, plentiful about Brathwaite."

"There's Colonel Dean," he suggested slyly.

"Old, bald-headed, red-faced, fat horror!"

"If he weren't married he might do for Bab!" laughed Joan.

"Admirably!" assented that young person, with her usual coolness; "for I am told he's well off."

"You'd better ask Mrs. Colonel here to tea, and butter the stairs before she leaves; then she'll fall down, and, being ancient, probably die!"

"Charlie! Don't be so wicked."

"Only offering a suggestion," he replied, demurely.

"And about the other Colonel?" pleaded Nan.

"Do tell me!"

"Well, I saw father talking to Colonel Treadillon at the three cross-roads."

"Colonel Treadillon! Why, Bab, here's a chance for you!" cried the girl, vivaciously.

"He is one of dad's dearest chums, and, of course, an old fogey!"

"He's nothing of the kind," corrected Charlie.

"He's very handsome, and not a day more than forty-five, if so much."

"That's very old!" declared Nan, gravely; and, indeed, in her young eyes, it seemed a great age.

"Rubbish!" retorted her brother. "A man's only in his prime at that age. Wait till you're as old, and see what a chicken you'll think yourself."

"I shan't be so foolish!"

"Oh, yes, you will, I say, Bab," turning to his eldest sister, "what will you do if our amiable parent brings the Colonel here to regale him on dainties?"

"I am sure I don't know," sighed Bab, dismally; for, like Mother Hubbard of nursery lore renown, "her cupboard was bare" of dainties, and only contained coarse and commonplace fare.

"He'll want turtle, and truffler, champagne, and brandy-and-soda!" said Joan, pulling a long face.

"No, I don't think that," replied Miss Templemore. "I remember his coming here eight or nine years ago, when you girls were staying at Nurse Liza's, and staying here for

a few days. He seemed very easy to please, and simple in his tastes."

"Yes; he's no end of a fine fellow!" agreed Charlie, warmly. "I remember how he used to play cricket with me in the paddock, and how many shillings and half-crowns he tipped me during the short time he stayed here."

"Then he won't be so bad if he does come!" cried Nan.

"Bad! It will be delightful!" declared young Templemore.

"Only think, girls, he has no less than six medals. What do you say to that?"

"A perfect hero," laughed Joan. "Bab, you are in luck's way. I envy you your soldier."

"Don't jest," said Bab, almost crossly. "What am I to do if father does bring him home, and nothing in the house?"

"Buy something," suggested Charlie, sentimentally.

"No money," shaking her head dolefully.

"Then—let's have tea," he remarked coolly, dragging a bag of cakes out of his pocket, and laying them on the table.

CHAPTER II.

"Sweet and fair, with a winsome grace,
That lies not all in her bonny face."

BARBARA rose, and folding up the jacket put it away in a corner, and then began preparations for tea. In this she was ably assisted by Joan and Nan, Charlie looking on from the depth of a great arm-chair, while his sisters spread the coarse, but snowy, cloth, fetched the cups and saucers from the kitchen, platter and huge loaf, and an extremely small pat of butter, and a tiny jug of milk.

Then, while Miss Templemore spooned out a small quantity of tea, Nan possessed herself of a huge toasting fork, presented another to Joan, and forthwith began to toast herself and the cakes before the cheery fire.

"Let's have an omelet," suggested Charlie, suddenly. "It's an age since we've had one."

"There are only eggs enough in for father's breakfast," interposed Barbara, quickly.

"Four will be enough for us," went on her brother, counting out fourpence from his slender stock. "Let me have that number, and Sarah can fetch some more for our A. P."

Thus besought, the mistress of Red House gave way, and soon all the paraphernalia for making an omelet, at which Charlie was a famous hand, stood on a little table by the fire, and the young fellow with his sleeves tucked up, was beating eggs and chopping onions; while Nan, relinquishing the cake toasting to her sisters, was busy helping him, and melting a lump of butter in the frying pan.

Presently it was done to a turn, and seating themselves at the big table they were on the point of attacking the tempting fare with all the eagerness of young, healthy, underfed appetites, when, horror of horrors, the door opened, and Major Templemore walked in, followed by a stranger—a man whose erect bearing, closely-cropped hair, and great drooping tawny moustache plainly proclaimed him a soldier.

For a full moment consternation was visible on each young face, and Terrence Templemore looked black as thunder, for there was more than a suspicion of the scent of onions in the air, the frying-pan was stuck up in a corner of the fender, broken egg shells, a whipper, a pudding basin, and sundry other kitchen utensils were piled higgledy-piggledy on the little round table by the fire-place, and the light that blazed from a solitary globeless gas jet displayed all these things plainly, as well as Master Charlie's tucked up shirt sleeves, for in the ardour of cooking he had cast off his coat, and Joan's shabby dress, and Bab's big, cooklike apron, and Nan's lovely flushed face and tumbled ruddy locks.

For a moment the amiable parent hesitated, scowling, then remembering that Rhoderick Treadillon, though full twenty years his junior, had been and was his most intimate friend, well acquainted with all his affairs, and scarcity of cash, and that he was always willing to lend or

give him anything he wanted out of his ample income, came forward laughing with affected bonhomie.

"Well, young people, you seem to be enjoying yourselves in a rough-and-ready fashion. I have brought a visitor to see you who wishes to renew his acquaintance with some of you, and become acquainted with the rest."

"Yes, father," said Barbara, rising and offering her hand to the stranger, whom she recognised as Colonel Treadillon.

"Do you remember me, Miss Templemore?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Perfectly well," she replied, quietly, having recovered her usual calmness.

"And so do I," exclaimed her brother, getting up to greet the guest.

"Let me see you are—Charlie!"

"Yes."

"And these are the rest of my bears," smiled the Major, jocosely, indicating Joan and Nan by a move of the hand. "This is Joan, and this Nan, the baby of the family."

The "baby" got up and shook hands with the Colonel shyly, not daring to look at him, being overwhelmed by the consciousness of a shabby gown, flushed cheeks, and unkempt locks, thereby missing the look of admiration he levelled at her.

"Delighted to have the pleasure of meeting you," he said earnestly. "I often tell your father that I envy him immensely having home ties, some one to welcome him when he comes in, and speed him on his way when he goes out, make his house comfortable for him."

"This doesn't look very comfortable," sneered Terrence. "Seems as though they had mistaken it for the kitchen."

"Charlie has been making an omelet," explained Nan, who was bolder than the rest; and stood lost in awe of her father.

"And it is getting cold," smiled Treadillon.

"Yes, Charlie makes such jolly ones," continued the girl, confidentially, her blue eyes wandering to where the tempting morsel lay bubbling and frothing on its dish.

"It looks very—jolly," agreed the Colonel, hesitating just a second over the slang word to which his tongue was unaccustomed, "and the cakes, too."

"I toasted some of them," she told him in childish glee.

"Then they must be nice."

"Will you try some?" she suggested, for she was getting desperately hungry, and bethought herself of this expedient for beginning the postponed meal.

"I should like to very much."

"Barbara," said Templemore at that moment. "Can you let us have some dinner at seven o'clock?"

"Yes, father," she replied faintly, for it was now nearly six, and there was nothing in the house ready, save a little soup, yet she could not say no.

Treadillon's quick eye noted her expression of dismay, and knowing how short his friend always was, he guessed the cause at once, and hastened to relieve Bab's anxiety.

"Don't trouble about dinner for me," he said, quickly. "I should like to have tea here with the young people, if I may!"

"Oh, nonsense," began Templemore.

"I've had one invitation," pursued the guest, smiling at Nan, who grew suddenly distressfully red and embarrassed.

"It's such a den," declared his host disparagingly, casting a contemptuous look around.

"I like den," declared the Colonel.

"Only fit for young bears like these unruly children of mine," went on Terrence, who invariably posed as a martyr to his offspring.

"I like bears, too," laughed Treadillon, "and I mean to try some of Master Charlie's omelet," and suitably the action to the word he slipped into a chair between Nan and Joan, and helped himself to a piece of the former's toasted cake.

"Well, of course, if you will—" began the Major again.

"Yes. I will, and it wouldn't do to have a

heavy dinner now, for you know I want you to sup with me at the hotel to-night."

"Delighted to," said the wily Irishman, pleased at the prospect of a good meal at his friend's expense, and saving his own viands. "Barbara, give me a cup of tea."

Obediently Miss Templemore filled a cup for him and one for Trellillon, then ringing for Sarah, she had the cooking utensils removed, and diving into her pocket produced the keys, and presently the ancient handmaiden came back with a jar of preserves and some marmalade, and a fresh pot of tea and a couple more cups and saucers; and then they all set to work on Charlie's omelet, that luckily was a big one, and proved sufficient for each one to have a bit.

"Are you fond of cooking?" asked the guest of Nan, his eyes resting again admiringly on the downbeat gold head.

"Pretty well," she replied. "I like making tiffy or hardbake."

"What a child it is," he thought. "What a lovely innocent child!"

"And you don't care for roasting or boiling, the drudgery part of it?" he went on aloud, his pleasant grey eyes full of mirth and amusement.

"No, and I never get a chance of doing any of it. Bab wouldn't let me. She says I should spoil the joint, and that then it would not be fit for father to eat."

"So you would," chimed in Joan.

"You haven't a great opinion of your sister's culinary powers," he queried, turning to look at the fair-haired girl at his other side.

"She makes very good bull's eyes," replied Joan, tranquilly, her mouth full of cake and jam.

"Bull's eyes!" repeated Trellillon somewhat mystified.

"Sagar, butter, and peppermint made into rounds, and browned," explained the girl.

"Oh, I see. She makes those well!"

"Yes."

"And you like them?"

"Yes. We all like them."

"Not as well as Bab's soft toffies," cried Nan, with sparkling eyes. "That's nearly as good as chocolate."

"Are you fond of chocolate?" asked the Colonel.

"Awfully fond. Like it better than anything else."

"Then I suppose you consume a large quantity of it?"

"No, I don't. I should like to, but we can't afford to buy it," she replied with childlike candour.

"Then you must let me give you some."

"Oh, thanks," the blue eyes sparkling like stars, left the pleasant bronzed face, and travelled across the table to fix themselves questioningly on Major Templemore's disagreeable one.

"Terrence, have I your permission to give this young lady some chocolates?" asked his friend, who with his usual quickness had intercepted the glance.

"Of course, Trellillon. Anything you like, my dear fellow. Chocolate will be much better for her than the horrible concoctions she makes herself."

"They are not horrible!" declared Nan, indignantly.

"I think they are," retorted her father.

"A slight difference of opinion, that is all," laughed Trellillon. "You must show me which is the best shop in Brathwaite for bonbons."

"Clutterby's is the best," replied the girl at once; "but they are awfully expensive!"

"That does not matter. They can hardly be as expensive as at Charbonnel's."

"Who is Charbonnel?" asked Joan.

"A bonbonniere in Bond-street."

"Bond-street. That is in London, isn't it?" queried the younger sister, her attention equally divided between the topic under discussion and a huge slice of bread-and-marmalade.

"Yes. Do you know Charbonnel's?"

"No. I have never been in London. None of us have except Charlie."

"Regular young savages, you see, Trellillon,"

chimed in the Major. "Haven't been anywhere, haven't seen anything; know nothing of London society or the *beau monde*."

"All the better for that," replied his friend, warmly. "They are all the more natural and charming."

"Do you think we are charming?" asked Nan, in blank amazement, sitting with the bread-and-marmalade poised half-way to her mouth.

"Yes; I think you are," smiled the Colonel, letting his eyes rest critically on the fair face beside him, with its star-like eyes and wild rose bloom.

"How nice!" and she clapped her hands delightedly. "Barbara always says I am a Tomboy, that Joan is quite silly with romantic ideas, and that she's an old frump!"

"My dear Nan—" began Bab, expostulatingly.

"Miss Templemore is not complimentary," remarked Trellillon, the smile broadening as he glanced at Barbara sitting stiffly upright at the head of the table, looking as though there were a strong spice of the old maid about her.

"She is truthful, though," observed Charlie with a grin. "Joan is always dreaming about lovers and marriage!"

"Charlie! how can you?" exclaimed that young person, indignantly.

"And as to Nan," without taking the slightest notice of his sister's interruption, "she's the greatest Tomboy I know. She can climb any tree, knows where all the birds' nests are, plays cricket, rounders, fishes like a true Walton, follows the beagles when she gets a chance—"

"Which isn't often!" put in Nan, tranquilly.

"And would ride to hounds like a mad thing, and be in at the death like any whelp!" concluded young Templemore.

"To be sure I would, if I got the chance! I'm only sorry I don't!"

"And I am glad you don't!" remarked her father; "for I am sure you would break your neck!"

"If she didn't, it wouldn't be for want of dare-devil riding!" said her brother.

"Are you very fond of riding?" asked Trellillon.

"Very! only I never get the chance of riding anything but an old blind Shetland pony that belongs to our washerwoman; and that only goes at a jog trot at best."

"Which doesn't suit you?"

"Not at all. I should like a great big black horse, like that Lord Lenny sometimes lends father, which rolls the eyes, and champs at the bit, and rushes madly at or over every obstacle."

"Not exactly the sort of horse for a lady to ride, I should say!"

"Perhaps not; but exactly suited to a Tomboy!" retorted Nan, an extra sparkle in the azure orbs.

From which speech, and the mutinous curl of the rosy lips, Colonel Trellillon concluded Miss Nan had a will of her own, and a wit which only wanted intercourse with the great world to make keen and brilliant.

"Then I shall come to-morrow morning to take you to Clutterby's," he said, when he and his host were preparing to depart for the hotel, and a choice little supper served in the Royal's best style.

"Yes, please," responded the youngest Miss Templemore, briskly. "I shall be ready to go as soon after ten as you like."

"Very well," assented the Colonel, as he made his adieu.

"You're in luck, you pickle!" cried Charlie, as the door closed on his retreating figure. "He'll give you enough chocolates to stock a shop. He's awfully rich, you know."

"And so handsome," sighed Joan, sentimentally. "Such lovely soft eyes, and such beautiful wavy hair."

"Why it's turning grey!" exclaimed Nan, in surprise.

"It's sprinkled a little on the temples, that's all. I'm sure I wish I had a chance of a lover like him, so noble, and grand, and rich."

"Lover, indeed!" echoed saucy Nan, with a toss of her golden head. "Please remember that

I don't like old men. They are not in my line. You are confounding me with sober Bab, and her liking for fossils. I prefer youth."

"Always supposing you can get it," retorted Bab, turning out the solitary gas-jet with a snap, and betaking herself off to bed.

CHAPTER III.

"Through the land
Singing love came,
To a garden wild,
Where among hoarded dreaming flowers,
A pale, golden-headed girl,
Like a daisy or a pearl,
Stood and smiled.
The reddest rose in all the land
He held to her;
Fell the poppies from his hand,
Brushed the gold bloom of her hair,
Smote her innocent eyes and fair,
Till they closed wearily."

THE next morning Nan was up betimes, and quite in a flutter at the delightful prospect before her of unlimited "chocs," as she termed the most delicious of all sweetmeats. She donned her best jacket and hat soon after breakfast, and then perambulated the "den" backwards and forwards like a wild animal in her restlessness, despite Bab's injunctions to sit still and not make herself look untidy, while she fairly flew to the door when she heard the bell ring, and had it open before Sarah had commenced the ascent of the kitchen stairs.

"So you have come!" she exclaimed, her blue eyes dancing with glee, as she held out both hands to Trellillon.

"Yes. Did you think I would not?"

"I thought you might forget," she replied.

"I never forget my promises," he rejoined, marvelling not a little at himself for feeling such keen pleasure on looking at the beautiful, winsome face, instinct with life and happiness.

"I am so glad you haven't forgotten this," she told him candidly.

"You would have been disappointed."

"Awfully," she assured him in her naive, half-boyish way. "You see," she explained, with that delightful frankness that became her so well, "we have so few pleasures, so little amusement that we snatch at anything in that way like greedy and voracious sharks."

"I wish all sharks were as pretty," he muttered under his breath.

"Eh!" she queried, not catching the purport of his mutterings.

"Is your father coming with us?" he asked to create a diversion, and sincerely hoping that for once in a way his old friend would decline his society, and let him escort his youngest daughter alone to Clutterby's.

"I don't think he has finished his breakfast yet," she replied. "Come and see," and she led the way to the dining-room, where, seated in an arm-chair before the fire, attired in a once magnificent dressing-gown, was Major Templemore, sipping his coffee, and trifling with an anchovy toast with all the languid air of a man of fashion.

"Ah, Trellillon!" he exclaimed, pleasantly. "You are the early bird that picks up the worm. I am a bit of a sluggard now."

"You would not be if you had the same inducement as I have to be early on this occasion," replied the soldier, gallantly glancing at Nan.

"Ah, yes! I remember. You are going to take my little girl to the sweetmeat shop."

"Yes. Are you coming with us, or will you trust her to me alone?"

"Trust her to you alone, my dear fellow! You know I would trust you with anything!" with an airy wave of the hand.

And it was a fact. Templemore, shallow, selfish and interested himself, could well appreciate the noble generosity and upright honourableness of his friend's character. Moreover, during the silent watches of the night it had occurred to the astute and needy Major that Rhoderick Trellillon would be a very desirable son-in-law, and that Nan, though only a child,

was still a very pretty one, and in another year, or even six months, might very well become a wife, if the opportunity offered. So he had determined to encourage his friend if he showed a predilection for any of his daughters, and give him every opportunity of prosecuting his suit.

"Thanks. Then shall we set off, Miss Nan?"

"I am quite ready," she declared, eagerly.

"Nan is a regular baby," said her father, with an unwontedly indulgent smile.

"Over chocolates," put in that young lady.

"And a good many other things, if your brother is to be believed!" laughed the Colonel.

"Oh, Charley's a quizz."

"Come back to luncheon, Trellillon," shouted Templemore, as they were going out, "if you have nothing better to do."

"Thanks, I shall be delighted," he responded, and then opening the door he passed out into the pale, golden, wintry sunshine, to take his first walk with Nan Templemore.

"Do you like Brathwaite?" he began, anxious to improve his acquaintance with her.

"Pretty well," she answered coolly, "only I should like a change from it sometimes."

"Don't you ever go away?" he asked, in some surprise.

"Oh, never. We can't afford it, you know."

"But—your father?" he began.

"Yes, father goes away. But that's a different thing," she said, with unconscious pathos. "He's obliged to go to Lord Lenny's or General Maturin's, and other people, and then there's no money left for us. Only," she added, brightening visibly, "now Charlie is making money he says he will take us away for a week or two when he can afford it. One at a time, and that will be delightful!"

"Yes, very," agreed her companion, thoughtfully, for her words were a revelation to him.

He knew Templemore to be fast and extravagant, but he had no idea that he would gratify his own selfish pleasures at the expense of his children.

"It is monotonous always living in the same place, seeing the same people, the same streets, the same houses. Don't you think so?"

"I should think very," he agreed.

"You could not bear it, of course!" she queried, looking up at him with those lovely blue eyes that already were playing havoc with his heart, stirring his pulses as they had never yet been stirred by woman's eyes in all the forty odd years of his life, "having been about so much, and seen so many different countries."

"I don't know," he replied, reflectively. "I begin to think now that I should like to settle down quietly, and have a home."

"Then you ought to marry," she said, promptly.

"Perhaps I ought," he rejoined, smiling a little at her candour and innocence of *les convenances*.

"Perhaps I should like to. Only—"

"Only what?" she questioned, looking up at him again.

"I am afraid no one would have an old fellow like me."

"Oh, nonsense. Heaps of girls would," she said, quickly, thinking of Barbara, and what an improvement on the stuffy, bald-headed old fogey of their girlish talk this pleasant, genial soldier would be as a husband for her.

"Not for love!" he continued eagerly, for like most men on the wrong side of forty, he was anxious now to think that he might be loved and married for himself, and not on account of what he possessed.

"Yes. Why not? Some girls don't care for boys."

"I wonder whether you are one of those girls!" he thought, as he followed her into Cinterby's.

There he let her work her own sweet will amongst the cakes and sweets, gave her everything she fancied, and supplemented it by two or three costly boxes of bon-bons of his own choosing.

Then, after purchasing a couple of pretty satin

caskets for her two sisters, he proposed returning, which they did, Nan carrying with her a box of "choes," one or two of which she surreptitiously put into her month every now and then like the child she was, to his secret amusement.

On their way back he stopped at a poultryer's, and ordered some fish and a brace of birds to be sent up to the Red House.

He was an old enough friend of Templemore's to be able to do this. Moreover, he had always played the part of banker to his needy brother officer, and knew it would far from give him offence, and he remembered Barbara's pale, dismayed face last night when her father asked for dinner, and concluded that it would be a relief to her to have something for luncheon provided.

As they walked slowly down the High-street, chatting gaily together, they met a tall, slim handsome young fellow, with dark eyes and hair, and features regular and classic as a Greek god's.

"Hallo! Trellillon," he exclaimed, stopping short, and holding out his hand, "I had no idea you were at Brathwaite."

"No! I only came yesterday."

"That accounts for my not having seen you before!"

"Yes. Is your regiment here now?"

"Yes. At the Colchester barracks. Nice quarters, but horribly dull place."

"Is it? I am sorry to hear it."

"Why? You have left the army now, I hear, so there is no chance of your being quartered in a dull little hole to languish of ennui, and nothing to do."

"Take care what you are saying. Miss Templemore is a native."

"Will you introduce me?" asked the young man, rather eagerly, for his eyes had wandered more than once to Nan's fair face. "and I will make my apologies."

"Captain Ashton, Miss Nan Templemore."

"I hope you will forgive my disparaging remarks about the town," he said, smiling at her.

"Oh, yes, certainly," she replied, coolly, "I quite agree with you, it is a dull little hole."

"I am glad you are of the same opinion with me."

"Yes. Why?"

"Because then I know I have not offended you."

"No, you have not offended me. Why should you?"

"People don't always like to hear their native place disparaged."

"People can't expect everybody else to think as they do," she retorted, quickly.

"No; quite right. Yet they often do, don't they, Trellillon?"

"Very often. There are so many unreasonable folk in the world."

"Just so; and now tell me" went on Ashton, as he turned and paced slowly along at Nan's side, "what has brought you to Brathwaite—business or pleasure?"

"Both," replied the Colonel. "You know, I suppose, that my uncle is dead!"

"When? Is he?" whistled the other.

"Yes. Six months ago. Died in Algiers."

"And left you everything, of course?"

"Of course; and one of my possessions is Caldecot Place, four miles from here."

"Lucky fellow. It is a splendid house."

"Yes. Not bad."

"Ah, that's the usual way in which you millionaires talk."

"I don't like the architecture of the house, though the grounds and park are well enough."

"You can alter that, perhaps."

"Yes, I may do so. You must come over and see me there."

"I shall be delighted to," replied Ashton.

"Are you going to settle down there at once?"

"Yes, in a day or two. Everything is ready for my reception, and the place manned by a whole regiment of old servants left by my uncle."

"I see. Well, you are a lucky fellow," repeated the Captain as they reached the Red House, and getting no invitation to come in,

he reluctantly shook hands and made his adieu.

"Handsome, isn't he?" said Trellillon as they walked up towards the house between the flower beds where here and there anemones reared their white heads and the crocus and primrose bloomed brightly.

"Yes, very," agreed Nan.

"And fascinating. He is a tremendous favourite with everybody, quite spoiled by petting."

"Is he?" she said in surprised tones.

"Yes. Does it surprise you?"

"A little."

"Why?"

"I don't think he is sincere; and I am sure he is very conceited!"

"That is hardly to be wondered at considering the flattery he receives."

"Perhaps not; still I don't see why a man should fancy himself superior to everyone else because he is good-looking."

"He is rich as well!"

"That would make no difference to me," replied the girl, innocently, raising her delicately pencilled eyebrows in wonderment.

"Don't you care for money?" asked her companion, quickly, a very eager light in his grey eyes.

"In one way I do," she acknowledged, candidly.

"I should like to have some to spend in pretty things; but I should never like a person because they were rich nor dislike them because they were poor."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Miss Nancy," he told her, earnestly. "You are not like any of the young ladies of the fashionable world."

"No; why should I be? I have never mixed with the fashionable world. I know nothing about it. I think people are very mean to judge others by the amount of money they have."

"So do I."

"And Colonel Trellillon?"

"Yes."

"My name is not Nancy."

"No; I thought it was because they called you Nan."

"My real name is Matilda, only they," nodding her ruddy head towards the house, "didn't like it, so they called me Nan."

"I see. A much more suitable cognomen for you."

And then they went into the dining-room, and partook of quite a dainty luncheon later on, owing to the Colonel's generosity, and then they sat in the drawing-room, and discussed "choes" and praised the beautiful caskets of sweetmeats he had sent them; and when Nan went to bed that night, she lay thinking of Colonel Trellillon, and came to the conclusion that he was the nicest person she had ever met, and when she fell asleep, her maiden dreams were full of him, and she still seemed to hear his deep, rich voice murmuring in her ear.

CHAPTER IV.

"Two wedded from the portal step;
The bells made happy carollings,
The air was soft as fanning wings,
White petals on the pathway aye!
Oh, pure-eyed bride!
Oh, tender pride!"

DURING the next few days Colonel Trellillon spent the greater portion of his time at the Red House, and his thoughtful care and many presents saved Barbara many an anxious moment, and made housekeeping comparatively easy work.

She was loud in her praises of him, and so were all the others, except perhaps Nan, who did not say much, though she brightened visibly whenever the Colonel's tall, erect figure was seen approaching the house, and actually took the pains to keep her curly locks in order, her collar straight, and put on a tidy gown.

Her brother and sisters were not slow in noting this, nor the fact that Trellillon was always at her side, showing a decided preference for her society to that of anyone else; but they maintained a wise and discreet silence, and neither

justed nor joked her about her middle-aged admirer after their usual fashion.

In this they were doing violence to their feelings, for they would dearly have loved to chaff her, and tell her old fossils were not in her line, only they dared not. Their amiable parent had called a council of war the day his friend took Nan to Clutterby's, and told them he thought the gallant soldier was struck with her girlish charms, and warned them, on pain of his extreme displeasure, not to chaff her, or open her eyes to the true state of affairs, as the bird being young and shy might take wing and be off, while it left in blissful ignorance of the Colonel's arse intentions might fall into the trap laid for her.

Half reluctantly they obeyed his commands. They knew it would be a grand thing for Nan to marry such a rich man and yet, with the perversity of youth, they grudged her to him, thinking she ought to mate with someone more of her own age, young and eager, not middle-aged and staid.

Meanwhile, Nan was perfectly happy. She tasted many delights through her father's friend that had never come into her prosaic monotonous life before; and the flowers he sent both to her and her sisters were simply lovely. She felt she could almost be fond of him for the sake of those lovely blooms, and she showed such childlike pleasure at his coming that in the world-weary man's heart began to spring up a delicious hope sweet to him as any boy's first attack of self-love, that after a while she might grow to care for him well enough to become his wife.

He breathed no word of this however, to any living soul, and after a fortnight he went to Caldecott Place, and for a week they saw nothing of him.

To Nan those seven days seemed longer than any she had known before. They lacked something—she hardly knew what. But on the eighth when his well-known figure was seen steering towards the house between the garden beds, she simply flew out to meet him, crying,—

"Oh, I am so glad to see you again!"

"And I to see you," he smiled, looking down at the fair face, the memory of which had haunted him persistently during the past week.

"Are you, really?"

"Yes. Really."

"I thought you had forgotten me amongst all your grand friends," with a little delicious pout of her red lips, that made him long to take her in his arms and kiss her.

"My dear child, I have not been amongst any grand friends," he protested, earnestly.

"No!" she said, half doubtfully.

"No, I have been setting up my household gods."

"And how do they look?" she queried smiling up at him.

"I want you come and tell me."

"That will be delightful."

"To-morrow, if your father will bring you!"

"We will go and ask him," and she led him a willing captive to the drawing-room, where the Major reclined lazily on a couch before a brisk fire reading a novel.

"Ah! Trellillon, back again!" he said with a feeling of pleasure only second to Nan's, for he knew presents of game, fruit, and wine would be sent again now his friend had settled his house and was at leisure to think about the wants of others.

"Yes, I've finished my arrangements at the Place, and I want you to come and see them."

"Delighted to."

"To-morrow, if you will!"

"Yes."

"And bring Miss Nan and her two sisters."

"You are very kind, Rhoderick," he said, gratefully, thinking this was a step in the right direction.

"I will send the carriage at half-past twelve for you" and then having settled that matter to his satisfaction he followed Nan to the Den, where he was quite at home, and presently he found

himself going to Clutterby's with Joan at his right and Nan on his left side.

And here they met Captain Ashton and one or two other officers of the Bombay Daghers, and the Captain renewed his acquaintance with Nan and procured an introduction to Joan, finally walking back beside her while Trellillon and her sister led the way.

The next morning at twelve-thirty punctually, the three Misses Templemore attired in their best bobs and tuckers and attended by the Major, entered the handsome carriage sent by Trellillon, and were soon whirling away through the country lanes, where the budding trees and tender blossoms peeping out from the mosses and undergrowth showed spring was at hand.

It did not take the fine, high-stepping greys who drew it long to reach Caldecott Place, where they found their host awaiting them on the marble terrace that ran round three sides of the house, in company with three or four gentlemen, one of whom proved to be Captain Ashton, for he was not slow in greeting the pretty sisters, attaching himself to Joan's side since Trellillon stuck by Nan.

"My sister has come to do the honours for me," he said, smilingly, as he led the way into the hall, where a great wood fire blazed cheerily under the tall, carved mantelpiece.

It was square, panelled with richly carved oak, and the shining floor, left nearly bare save for a rug here and there, reflected back the ruddy glare of the fire from its polished oaken surface. In the corners were some quaint old cabinets loaded with rare china, curiously carved ivory figures, rococo jewellery, cameos, mosaics, and other curios, while on the walls hung miniatures of dead and bygone celebrities, intermingled with small silver and brass gorgets, such as were worn by the English troops in the last century.

Standing before the fire, full in its red glow, stood a very beautiful brunette, who looked in her gorgeous dress of crimson satin, like some gay-plumaged bird from foreign climes. She came forward to meet her brother's guests with an easy grace of bearing, and a thoroughly self-possessed manner, that showed she was a thorough woman of the world.

"So glad to meet you," she said smiling, as she shook hands with the sisters, her sparkling dark eyes resting longest on Nan's bonny blonde head.

"I hope we shall become good friends."

"I hope so, too," replied the girl with her usual frankness.

"I don't like having enemies," she said.

"You haven't many, I should think," smiled Lady Vavasour, amused by the childlike speech of the other.

"Not that I am aware of. Only sometimes we don't know which are enemies and which friends."

"Quite true, my dear."

"It is impossible that you could have any of the former," said a soft, silky voice at her side, and turning, she found Captain Ashton, standing beside her, having watched his opportunity when Trellillon moved away for a moment.

"I am not certain of that," she replied.

"But I am," he said in a low tone, meant only for her ear. "One so lovely can only win good wishes and friendship."

"Oh, it does not matter about looks," she declared, in her frank way. "Pretty people are generally more disliked than ugly ones."

"I think they are generally beloved," he whispered, meaningly, and the girl coloured a little, and was glad that just then the diversion of going in to luncheon occurred, where she found herself between her host and a fat old man, who was paying no end of attention to Barbara, and who, the afterwards heard, was Mr. Vanbrugh, a Russian merchant, immensely wealthy, and on the look out for a young and pretty wife. During the meal the Colonel was very attentive to Nan, while Ashton, though he sat next to Joan, and kept his words for her, let his dark passionate eyes stray very often across the table to where Nan sat, in blissful unconsciousness of his ardent looks.

"How do you like the place, Miss Nan?" asked Colonel Trellillon later on, when he had shown her the blue drawing-room, with its satin and silver hangings, the library, with its wealth

of valuable books, the conservatories with their crowds of lovely wax-like blooms, the commodious stables, the high-bred horses, the pictures, china, curiosities, weapons, and all his other treasures.

"It is the most beautiful place I have ever seen," she answered, simply, her eyes straying away over the lawn and garden to the park, where the graceful dappled deer herded, and the timid rabbits burrowed, and the giant oaks and elms were leaving fast.

"That is great praise," he said, pleased.

"Not too great," she answered, earnestly. "It seems to me that nothing is wanting here."

"And to me only one thing," he replied.

"And that?" she asked, innocently, looking up at him, and not understanding the drift of his speech.

"I will tell you some day."

"Way not now."

"This is not—not the right time," he replied, evasively.

"You might tell me!" she pouted, with all a child's insistence.

"Wait," he smiled.

"I don't like waiting!"

"I promise that I'll tell you before the summer is over."

"I suppose I must be content with that; only I can't think what it is you want."

"No!"

"Everything is so perfect here."

"Not in my eyes."

"By the way," he went on a minute later, "would you care to come and stay here, and live as a little? My sister is going to remain with me for the present, and we should be so glad if you would take pity on us."

"There is nothing I should like better!" replied Nan, eagerly, never giving a thought to her scanty wardrobe, which was anything save suitable for visiting at a grand house.

However, Barbara did when she heard of the invitation, and was absolutely dismayed at the prospect of Nan going to stay at Caldecott Place with two gowns, a collection of darned stockings, one white petticoat, one hat, patched boots, down-at-heel house-slippers, &c.

For once in a way the A. P. came to the rescue, actually producing some money for new clothes for his youngest; which, in later days, Bab came to think was given him for the purpose by Colonel Trellillon.

After a fortnight's hard work with the scissors and the sewing machine, she was ready to go to the Place, and set off one bright morning in the barouche with Lady Vavasour, looking so lovely and winsome, that involuntarily that lady's eyes went back again and again to the sweet face, with the wild-rose bloom, azure eyes, and coronal of golden hair, and she ceased to wonder at her brother's infatuation, and thought it only natural that he, grave, staid, and middle-aged, should love ardently one so young and fair.

Nan enjoyed the visit immensely. A world opened before her of which she had only the vaguest idea.

From the disagreeableness of poverty she went with a bound to the ease and comfort riches give.

Every luxury money could procure was lavished on her and surrounded her; and, with the flexibility of youth, she adapted herself to her surroundings as though to the manner born.

The master of the Place was delighted at the pleasure shown by his young guest in everything, and seemed to grow younger by reason of her companionship.

They were always together; chaperoned, when absolutely necessary, by Lady Vavasour—generally alone, walking about the park, or strolling in the garden, or in the drawing-room, she singing, and he listening to the fresh young voice, whose sweet tones he had learnt to love so well.

Her sisters and father came occasionally to luncheon or dinner, and Captain Ashton and Mr. Vanbrugh were constant visitors, especially the former.

It was curious how frequently the young man wanted to consult his former chief about different

trivial matters, things of no moment, apparently, but which yet brought him day after day from Braithwaite to Caldecott Place, and kept him there hours, and sometimes rather to Treasillon's annoyance, for he did not play tennis himself, and he hardly cared to sit still and look on at Ashton and Nan knocking the balls about, and laughing gaily, while they chatted like magpies about all sorts of nonsensical things.

"Take care of that young Adonis!" said Lady Vavasour one afternoon, with a serious nod of the head, as Ashton rode off, turning every now then while in sight to wave his hand to the girl who stood on the marble terrace looking after him.

"What do you mean?" asked her brother.

"Can't you see what's going on?" she asked, tranquilly.

"No-o!"

"Why he's making love to Nan."

"And she?" he asked, breathlessly, a sickening and sense of impending loss at his heart.

"As far as I can tell she does not care about him at present, save as a companion."

"Thank Heaven!" murmured the Colonel.

"But, he is young, handsome, fascinating. She may grow to care for him."

"Then what do you advise, Florence?" he asked, anxiously.

"That you propose at once, and marry her as soon as possible."

"I will take your advice about the proposing," he said, quickly. "As to the marrying, that must rest with my little darling," and, stepping through the window, he went out on the terrace and joined Nan.

"Come to the orchard!" he said, presently; and when they were there he made her sit down on the flower-embellished grass, and flinging himself at her feet, took both her hands in his.

"Nan," he began, gravely. "I have something to say to you!"

"To say to me!" she echoed, a little startled at his tone and manner.

"Yes!"

"What is it?" she queried, looking down at him inquiringly.

"Can't you guess?"

"No. I haven't an idea. Have I offended you?"

"Offended me, dear child? No; I don't think you could do that," and he looked up at her, all his honest love shining in his kindly gray eyes.

She had no hat on, the sunbeams played on her head, and glittering in the meshes of her bright hair, made the roses in her cheeks glow deeper. The apple-blossoms fluttered down and rested here and there on her breast and shoulders, the soft wind stirred the little curls on her brow gently, while her lovely starry eyes sought his with inquiry in their blue depths.

"Nan!" he said, rising a little from his reclining posture, but still holding her hands tightly, "do you like me?"

"Oh, yes, you know I do!" she replied, frankly.

"And you like the Place?"

"Need you ask me?"

"Yes, I want to know!"

"I like it better than any other house I have ever been in."

"Would you be content to pass the greater part of your life here? To call it home?"

His passionate eyes were fixed eagerly on the sweet face, his voice trembled, his breath came pantingly from between his parted lips.

"Yes!" she said, in low tones, while the rose-tint in her cheeks deepened to damask.

"Then, Nan, will you be my wife?"

For a moment there was silence; then she lifted her face and said, "Yes!"

"My darling!" he cried, rapturously, as he caught her to his breast, and covered the blushing face with kisses. "My love, my own! Mine till death parts us!"

"And do you really love me?" he asked later on, as they paced under the blossom-loaded apple trees.

"I—I—like—you—very—very much; but Colonel Treasillon—"

"Call me Rhoderick!" he interrupted, passionately.

"Well, Rhoderick, I think I hardly know what—love—is," she faltered.

"Then I will teach you, sweetheart!" he cried, taking her once more in his strong arms, and kissing the sweet, unresisting lips.

A month later Nan became his wife, there being no obstacles in the way, such as an obdurate father, want of money, a home for the bride.

Everything was fair, plain sailing, and only one pair of eyes scowled on the bride and her groom as they "from the portal step," and those belonged to Arthur Ashton; and as neither Colonel or Mrs. Treasillon saw the baneful glance it did not matter much, and affected their happiness not one whit.

CHAPTER V.

"In the skies the sapphires blue
Now hath won its richest hue;
In the woods the breath of song
Sheds a ray.

In the deep heart of the rose
Now the crimson love-lure glows;
Now the glow worm's lamp by night
Sheds a ray.

Dreamy, starry, greenly bright,
Come away!

COLONEL TREASILLON took his young bride first to Paris, showing her all the gay delights of that wonderful city. Then they went on to Switzerland, visited Germany and Italy, passing part of the winter at Rome, for Nan, never having been abroad before, was wild with delight at all the strange sights and scenes, and did not seem anxious to return to England; while he, though he had seen all the wonders of the city of the seven hills several times, was quite content to visit them again in company with his lovely young bride, and saw beauties in broken columns, old pictures, and rare cameos, such as he had never seen before.

Then to gratify a whim of hers he took her on to Constantinople. He had told her he thought she would be disappointed, as all the glamour of romance could not hide the undeniable dirt of the East.

But when the vessel dropped her anchor at the entrance of the Golden Horn, the city looked so beautiful in the light of the early morn that she was enchanted; she liked the row where in the *caïque*, enjoyed the squabble at the custom house, and the long climb over the slippery muddy stones, and dogs innumerable up to the Pera plateau, where they stopped at the Hotel d'Angleterre in the Grande Rue.

From a window in the hotel the girl watched the life of the place in full circulation. There were people of every nation, in every dress, talking in different languages; elderly Turkish ladies in yashmack and trousers studied the feminine frippery in the shop windows, which displayed almost everything that is sold in London, Vienna, or Paris; soldiers in blue jackets tramped by; vendors of cheese, pastry, fruit, and a score of other things, displayed their wares, and shouted themselves hoarse in their endeavours to dispose of them; streams of equestrians, queer-looking Jews, all sorts and conditions of men swarmed along the ill-paved street, below the curious square windows of the old houses, that above the first story jutted out over the road, until they were so near their *vis à vis* that it was possible to toss anything from one window to another, and hold converse across the street.

Nan was determined to see all that was to be seen in the queen of cities, and Treasillon, good-naturedly, humoured her, and took her to see everything he possibly could.

What she was most struck with was the dogs of Stamboul, those street scavengers who helped to keep clear the refuse-strewn streets of Constantinople. Lying asleep in the scorching sun, utterly indifferent to all going on around them, hicks, cuffs, heavy weights, people treading on them, serenely indifferent until hunger wakes them, and they trot off to scour the streets, and find food wherewith to assuage their hunger.

Rhoderick Treasillon found a fortnight at the Hotel d'Angleterre, in the Pera Grande Rue, quite sufficient, and at the end of that time coaxed his bride into returning to England.

They reached the Place one soft April evening, and the majestic old house looked all the more grand in contrast with the squalor and magnificence which they had recently left.

Major Templemore, Bab, Joan, and Charlie, were all there to receive them, and the Colonel felt a little pang at his heart as he saw his beloved wife kiss and hug her brother and sisters with an abandon which she never showed when embracing him. Not that he had anything to complain of during the nine months of their wedded life.

She had always shown herself frankly fond of him, was always cheerful and good-tempered, but he adored her so much he constantly tormented himself with the idea that she was not quite happy, that she would be better married to a young man only four or five years her senior.

The idea occurred to him with greater force than ever as he saw her hanging on to Charlie's arm, laughing gaily, and chattering like a veritable magpie.

"She never chatters like that to me," he thought, with a heavy sigh, not knowing that her reverence for him was so great, and her idea of his exalted cleverness so great, that she was afraid to bore him with her girlish talk, and always tried to be sedate and staid as she thought he would like her to be.

Poor foolish couple! At sixes and sevens like all the rest of the world, despite their love for each other.

"Now tell me all the news, girls," cried Nan, when she had them safe in her bedroom, and they were assisting her to take off her travelling-dress.

"What sort of news?" asked Joan, with a sly glance at Bab.

"Why, about your matrimonial prospects, to be sure," returned the young matron, vivaciously.

"You've been precious quiet over what you have been doing since I left. Haven't given me much information in your letters."

"Perhaps there wasn't any to give," replied Joan, demurely, again glancing at Barbara, whose face was unusually red, and who looked singularly embarrassed.

"Oh, nonsense! Come, tell me; have either of you had any offers?"

"I haven't."

"You then, Bab?"

"I—well—I—"

"Well, yes; she has," put in Joan, regally.

"Who is it?" asked Mrs. Treasillon, imperiously.

"Mr. Vanbrugh," replied Miss Templemore, rather faintly.

"Never, Bab?"

"It's true."

"And—have you accepted him?"

"Yes."

"True to your colours!" laughed Nan.

"Yes; she means to be an old man's darling," put in Joan.

"Rhoderick told me he has heaps of money."

"Yes; he is very rich."

"And when are you to be married?"

"Next autumn."

"Sorry I can't be bridesmaid, Bab."

"So am I."

"You'll have to do with me!" grinned Joan.

"And you?" said Mrs. Treasillon, fixing her suddenly with her brilliant eyes. "What have you to tell?"

"Not much," she replied, evasively, blushing furiously.

"Stuff! Tell me who it is!"

"I'm not engaged," she began, hesitatingly.

"Not! Well, you hope to be. To whom?"

"Captain Ashton."

"Captain Ashton!" echoed Nan in surprise, wondering why she felt such surprise on hearing his name.

"Yes."

"He has paid her a great deal of attention since last summer," Bab informed her.

"Indeed!" replied Mrs. Treasillon, as she fastened a diamond brooch in the laces of her tea-gown.

"But he hasn't proposed!"

"No, not yet," said Joan, with a deeper blush.

"We must bring him to the point, dear. You will have more opportunities of seeing him now I have come back; for, of course, he will come here to call, and I can throw you into each other's society. Come, now, and look at these gowns I have brought you from Paris. Pierrot has unpacked them;" and, followed by her sisters, she went into the dressing-room, and they were soon deep in the mystery of réclata silk, and ponce velvets, Mechlin lace, and rose point, &c.

Mrs. Trevelion was not wrong when she said Arthur Ashton would call at the Place.

Two days later, as she was lounging in the drawing-room alone, playing with the silky ears of her little King Charles spaniel, the butler announced Captain Ashton.

As she rose to receive him, he gave a perceptible start of astonishment.

Mrs. Trevelion was a very different person from Nan Templemore.

She was rich now—had the power to gratify every whim and fancy. The old shabby gowns and patched boots were a thing of the past. Delicate muslins, rich velvets, costly laces, soft silks—these were what she decked her lovely person with now, and, it must be owned, to great advantage. Moreover, during the last nine months, she had learnt the power of her beauty—before, only guessed it.

She had been worshipped by her husband, flattered and petted by an admiring crowd of friends and acquaintances in Paris and Rome—been made a little queen of; and some of the old girlish frankness had gone, or at least was concealed, under a self-possessed society manner.

It was with perfect ease and aplomb she held out one slim ringed hand to her guest.

"You are back at last," he said as he seated himself on the couch at her side, despite the growls of the little King Charles.

"At last!" she echoed with a smile. "Why, we were only away nine months."

"Nine months! That is an age! Bralthwaite seemed quite dull without you and the Colonel."

"Indeed. We ought to feel flattered."

"And don't, I suppose!" he queried, with an angry gleam in his dark, passionate eyes.

"Well, really, I hardly know," she responded, with a little tantalizing gesture of the white hands. "I don't see why our absence should have made the place dull. Colonel Trevelion was never there until last spring, and as for me, I never mixed with the Bralthwaite folk."

"You thought them beneath you!" he suggested.

"I did not say so."

"You insinuated it."

"Not at all," she replied, quickly. "The reason why I did not go into society was simply this. My father is a poor man, and could not afford me and my sisters smart gowns, and as our old black day dresses were not suitable for dinners, or dances, or tennis parties, or anything of that kind, we refused all invitations, and remained under our own roof-tree."

"This is a pleasant exchange," he remarked, glancing round at the dainty room with its rich blue and silver hangings, a curious flicker of anticipated triumph in his dark eyes, for he looked upon her speech as a virtual acknowledgment of having married her middle-aged husband for his money. Though nothing was really further from Nan's artless mind than to convey such an impression, she only spoke with her usual candour and frankness.

"Yes, isn't it a delightful old house? I am never tired of looking at all the treasures and antiquities."

"A novelty at present," he rejoined, with a slight sneer on his handsome mouth. "How soon will you get tired of it, I wonder."

"Why, I hope, never," she replied, looking at him with wide open luminous eyes full of wonder. "It is my home."

"Yes, I know. But people often get tired of their homes."

"Not such a lovely one as this!" she expostulated.

"I have known women grow weary of an even more lovely place than this. So much, you know, depends on the society you have in your house."

"Yes, I suppose so," she agreed, with a faint sigh which his quick ear caught and interpreted wrong.

"You are often alone?" he pursued, his passionate eager eyes on the fair face he was learning to love fatally well.

"Just at present I am," she allowed, frankly.

"The Colonel's having some improvements made on his other estate in Marley. The cottages were tumble-down hovels, quite insanitary; he is having commodious ones built."

"And he has the heart to leave you for tumble-down hovels," he said, jestingly, to cover the deeper meaning of his words.

"Why, yes, of course," laughed the girl, gaily. "He couldn't let the poor people die of typhoid and diphtheria."

"Do you know, Mrs. Trevelion," said her companion, still in a light, mischievous way, "that if I stood in the Colonel's shoes—"

"You would do just as he does," she interrupted.

"I should never be able to tear myself away from your side."

"What a very inconvenient husband you would be."

"You wouldn't think that if—if you loved me."

"Oh, yes, I should," she told him with strong conviction. "I should grow very tired of a husband who followed me about all day, like my shadow."

"Then you are different from most women."

"Possibly," she responded, coolly. "I never could understand women liking to have a man tied to their apron-strings all day, trotting him about like a tame tabby cat."

"Ha! ha!" he laughed. "What a simile!"

"A very true one."

"We differ in opinion."

"Yes, I think we always shall. I believe Captain Ashton there is something in our temperaments antagonistic to each other."

"I hope not," he said, earnestly, indeed so earnestly that she looked at him in surprise.

"Why?" she asked, after a pause.

"Because I have been hoping that we might become good friends and true."

"Well, I trust we shall," she responded, at once thinking of Joan and her evident tenderness for this handsome, dashing young soldier, and her promise to try and bring her sister's love affairs to a satisfactory conclusion.

"It will not be my fault if we don't," he assured her, with emphasis, which made her believe, poor innocent child, that he would ask her assistance in his courtship and propitiation of the A. P. after awhile.

"My sisters tell me they have seen a good deal of you since we went away," she said, thinking to give him a hint that she understood how matters lay.

"Yes, Major Templemore kindly gave me the entrée of the Red House, and I availed myself eagerly of his permission to call."

"He is very much in love," thought Nan, delightedly. In which conjecture she was right, only she had hit on the wrong person as the object of his affections.

"Miss Templemore and Miss Joan always had some news to tell me about you—and the Colonel," he added as an afterthought.

"Yes."

"I used to listen with great pleasure to bits of your letters that they read out."

"Where did they read them? In the den?" she cried, quickly, her thoughts reverting to the happy bygone days of her childhood, when they had discussed their scramble meals and the news of the day in the shabby old room, collected round the fire-place anyhow, and poking plates on their knees, and cups and saucers on stools on the ground or anywhere they could put them.

"In the den!" he repeated as though mystified.

"Yes, our old schoolroom," she explained.

"No. Your sisters used always to see me in the dining-room or the drawing-room, a very pretty and tasty apartment, by the way."

"Of course," she said, suddenly remembering that she had taken a peep into a room that was transformed from antique ugliness to modern prettiness, by reason of the many presents she had sent her sisters from Paris, Rome, Geneva, Nuremberg, Venice, and a heap of other places she had visited during her sojourn abroad.

Her husband gave her a very liberal allowance besides a great many presents, and she, knowing how startled the girls were, spent nearly the whole of it on things for them and their rooms, so that their attire and their house were very different from what they had been.

"You mean your sisters have taste?"

"I suppose they have."

"It runs in the family, evidently," looking at her dress. "That is a lovely gown you have on, Mrs. Trevelion."

"I am glad you like it. Worth designed it for me."

"Yes. It shows the master-hand. Are you coming to our dance on the third?" he asked, and then followed a conversation on all the amusements likely to take place in or about Bralthwaite during the next two months.

At last he rose to go, reluctantly, yet feeling he had strained to the limit the length of time allowed for a ceremonious visit.

"Will you come and have luncheon here tomorrow?" she asked him, determined at once to give Joan her opportunity of bringing him to the point. "Some of my people are coming."

"I shall be delighted," he replied, readily, only too pleased to think he should see her again so soon.

After that day Captain Arthur Ashton's visits to the Place became very frequent, of almost daily occurrence.

Certainly he was always there when Joan was there; but it was equally certain that he was often there when Joan was at the Red House, while he appeared at every entertainment where Mrs. Trevelion appeared, and cavalièred her devotedly.

Joan came in for a share of the cavalièring when she accompanied her sister, and folks thought the handsome Captain was making the running with the second Miss Templemore, and that his friend's wife was simply chaperoning the lovers, and so the busy tongue of scandal was still, and did not wag as is usual on these occasions.

The young man was living in a sort of trance as the days and weeks wore away, and grew more madly in love with Nan as each hour passed in her society, and thought she returned his wild passion.

Her innocence and lack of knowledge of wickedness and the ways of the world helped him in this self-deception, and, above all, her desire to secure her sister's happiness.

When he spoke of love to her in veiled terms, she thought he was alluding to Joan. When he paid her a compliment, she concluded at once that it was Joan's fair prettiness he was praising.

While he quite misunderstood her pleasure at seeing him and her frequent invitations for him to come to the Place to quiet luncheons, to little dinners, where frequently Joan, Charlie, his hostess, and himself would compose the dinner-party, the offer of a seat in her pony phaeton, when she knew her sister would be with her, and a hundred other little things which she did in the goodness of her young heart, seeking to bring the two, whom she supposed to be lovers, together.

He was not a good man. He never stopped to count the cost to himself or anyone of his strong, wild passion. He simply loved intensely, idolatrously.

The innocence of his boyhood, Heaven help him, had vanished long ago. He had become the slave of strong desires, of mad interests, that threatened to repress and engulf him and others in their dark depths.

Meanwhile, as spring gave place to summer, and July came with its wealth of sweet flowers, its fast ripening grain and fruit, Rhoderick Trevelion grew strangely grave and silent.

He was suffering intensely, but he hid his suffering from all the world, more especially from the sweet girl he had made his wife, who was the delight, and yet torment of his life.

He thought her affection was slipping away from him—her love, he told himself with keen scorn, he never possessed.

He was a fool to think he ever would. What was there in him to chain a fairy, blithe, wandering creature like Nan?

Like unto like. What wonder that she sought so eagerly the society of Arthur Ashton? He was young like herself, gay, bright, joyful.

He could understand her, share her pleasures, be a fitting companion for her, while he, Treallion, already felt the chill shadows of age falling on him.

Now, too late! he bitterly regretted having gathered the sweet young flower to wear in his breast. They had nothing in common, at least, so he told himself wearily.

He most unwisely treated her as a child, kept all his business affairs and worries to himself, and left her to her amusements and her gay friends.

Nan would have liked dearly to share all her husband's plans and pursuits, and be often with him. But she feared to bore him, and was very humble in her love, which is generally the case when a very youthful girl, who knows nothing of the tender passion, loves for the first time a man older and cleverer than herself, one who is a sort of hero, too, and has made the world ring with his bravery.

Colonel Treallion did not doubt his wife's purity, was not angry with her, only felt a great pity for the child who had told him little more than a year ago under the blossoming apple-trees that she didn't know what love was, and determined to write to his sister to come and stay with them, and see if she could give him any advice, do anything that would ease the weary aching at his heart.

CHAPTER VI.

"For, see, a horse is at the door,
And little King Charlie is snorting,
Go back, my lord, across the moor,
For you are not her darling!"

"Good-bye, Rhoderick!"

"Good-bye, dear!"

"What time will you be back?"

"I don't know exactly."

"Don't be very late."

"No!"

"Come as soon as you can."

"Yes," responded the Colonel, bending over his stirrup leather, and missing the wistful look in his wife's lovely blue eyes.

"You'll be sure to be back to dinner!"

"Yes. Why are you so anxious to-day, Nan, about my return?" he queried, "Can't you amuse yourself during my absence?"

"Yes; but—" with a delicious little pout, "you go so often to Marley now—nearly every day."

"My dear child, our poor folk must be well housed. There is so much to be seen to."

"You never ask me to go with you."

"Would you care to come?" he queried very eagerly, a joyous look sweeping over his troubled face.

"Very much, only—"

"Only what?"

"I thought you didn't want me with you there."

"I always want you, Nan," stretching down a hand, holding his whip and clasp her's in it as well.

"Then may I come to-morrow?"

"Yes, darling. I will have the phaeton out and drive you over."

"Thanks, and Rhoderick—"

"Yes."

"You said I might learn riding."

"Yes, dear. So you may. Anything you like."

"But—" hesitating and looking up at him with a lovely shyness.

"Well," encouragingly.

(Continued on page 88.)

A SECRET SIN.

—30—

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SLOWLY and solemnly Bernard Vansittart was carried by the two young officers back to the Gatehouse—the only home which as a lonely boy he had ever known. All their fierce disgust and horror were merged in infinite pity, as they laid him down on the sofa in the breakfast-room.

The doctor, who had been sent for to attend Lucy Mitford, said all was over. By his last, rash act, he had gone beyond the reach of earthly science or earthly judgment, and in one instant his sin-stained soul had passed beyond the circle of mortality into the presence of his Maker.

Sir Roger stood like a statue at the head of the sofa, with his thin hands clasped on the handle of his stick. Not a word passed his lips, but he bent his head as a sign that he heard what the doctor said, perhaps thinking that he knew it all beforehand. His face was stern as well as sad. He felt that having known the sad history of Bernard's father, he might have given more care and thought to the son.

Pera, utterly unshaken by her cousin's awful death, leant against the doorway, sobbing convulsively, whilst Bertie Vyvyan kept casting a furtive glance towards her, his heart brimful of sympathy which he dared not utter.

Old Thomas stood in the hall, wringing his hands, and muttering, whilst the tears ran down his cheeks,—

"I've known him since a boy, and to think the young master should come to this! Only to think of it! Lord, ha' mercy upon us!"

"We had better slope," Val said, in a low voice.

Bertie nodded, and looked round at the Baronet.

"We are bound to be back at barracks, Sir Roger. Is there anything we can do for you in Warburton?"

"Thank you, I'm very grateful for all you've done. There are some arrangements which will have to be made to-morrow. I would not trouble you, but I know nothing about the man," passing his hand wearily over his forehead.

"We will come over as soon as ever we can get away. I only wish—" with a glance at Bernard's still face.

"Ah, don't talk of it! You were not to blame—you could not know his weakness, but I ought to have guessed it." He held out his hand to both in turn, and then they silently turned to leave. In the doorway Bertie stopped, feeling that he could not pass Pera, without some sign. Yet, what could he say?

"Miss Clifford," he said hoarsely, "if there is anything on earth I can do for you—I—"

She shook her head, and kept her face buried in her hands. She was right; he had no right to express his sympathy—no doubt she was thinking the sooner he was out of the house the better. If it had not been for him her cousin's crimes might have remained undiscovered, and he might still be living, with time for repentance before him.

With indescribable bitterness in his heart he stepped out into the cool, starlit night. Through no fault of his own it seemed as if he was destined to bring nothing but grief to the Clifford family. Captain Valentine beckoned to the old butler to come out and speak to them. They had a hasty consultation about necessary arrangements, and then hurried to the stables in search of their horses.

Before they parted for the night, Valentine gave an affectionate grip to Vyvyan's shoulder.

"Well, old man, there's one substantial good come out of this miserable business—you are cleared, thank Heaven!"

"Yes, but don't you see," intolerable anguish in his voice, "she'll hate me for it always!"

He turned away abruptly, and shut his door

behind him, as if the subject were too painful for discussion. What was all the honour and the esteem of the world to him if Pera's good opinion were denied him?

Val shrugged his shoulders, thankful that he had not given his volatile heart irrevocably into Miss Clifford's keeping, for love-affairs did not seem to prosper in Blankshire.

Vyvyan found a tiny note awaiting him from his betrothed:

"Where are you? Have you forgotten me?"
(Signed) "EVA."

He threw it on the table, and himself on his bed. But his imagination was too much excited by the events of the night to allow him to sleep, and before he had enjoyed any satisfactory rest, he had to get up to attend to "stable-duty."

No wonder that Eva's little note was forgotten till he came back to his room just before luncheon. He reproached himself for his carelessness, and wrote a line in pencil to explain that he could not go to Houghton House, as pressing affairs took him in a different direction. Then he remembered how she loved him, with another pang, and added,—

"You know that business alone would keep me from you.—Your own," "E. VYVYAN."

It would have been more like a lover's note if the B had been enlarged to "Bertie," and the "Vyvyan" left out; but he was not in a mood to study trifles, and he thought he had done his duty thoroughly when he remembered to dispatch the letter by special messenger.

As soon as they could get off, he and Captain Valentine rode down to the Gatehouse, where their presence was urgently required. They were of great assistance to Sir Roger, taking much unpleasant work off his hands, and the next day they had to attend the Inquest, which was held at a small inn near the Castle.

During this melancholy time, Pera was entirely engrossed in nursing Lucy Mitford, who was slowly brought back to life through constant care. Little Tony cried so incessantly for his mother that Mrs. Jones was at last obliged to bring him up to the Gatehouse in order that he might see her. He would not be content till he had put his golden head close to hers, and touched her poor bruised forehead with his pretty pouting lips. Her eyes followed him longingly, but she was so dreadfully injured by the fall that she had to lie in bed like a log, moving neither hand nor foot. The horror of discovering her husband's body had given a shock to her nervous system from which it would take time to recover, besides which her right arm and leg were broken.

Dr. Grosvenor suggested that it would be better to send her to a hospital, but Pera would not hear of it. All Lucy's misfortunes had come upon her through a member of the Clifford family, and she meant to repay the debt as well as she could by nursing her back to health and strength. Fortunately, Lucy had one consolation in her child. For his sake, she was content to struggle back to life, although her husband had gone from her for ever.

Bertie Vyvyan, as soon as he could finish off all the melancholy business connected with the tragedy of the twentieth of August, betook himself to Houghton House with all the calm composure of innocence.

The butler looked grave as he threw open the door, and had no remark to make in respectful fashion about the weather, as he usually did, since Vyvyan had been promoted to the position of future son-in-law of the house. Very much pre-occupied with his own thoughts, Bertie noticed nothing till he found himself face to face with Lady Houghton instead of his betrothed in the drawing-room.

"I hope Eva is not worse!" he said, anxiously.

"If she is worse I don't suppose you will concern yourself about it, Mr. Vyvyan."

"I don't understand you, Lady Houghton," drawing himself up.

"I am afraid I understand you," looking him straight in the face. "By your conduct during the last week, you have shown us that you wish to break off the engagement with my daughter."

"Heaven forbid! What do you think of me, Lady Haughton? Am I lost to all sense of honour? What have I done?" in utter perplexity.

"You have scarcely paid the attention to Eva which she has the right to expect," stiffly.

"Whose fault was that?" his eyes frank and fearless. "Am I to be blamed because I have to help in discovering one murder and preventing another? Do you know that I had a near shave myself? Have you heard nothing of what has been going on?"

Lady Haughton opened her eyes. "Nothing! Lord Haughton has been away, and I never read the papers."

"Then you don't even know that the body of Anthony Graves has been found, and that I am cleared?" scarcely believing that such a thing was possible.

"Is it really true? I am so glad," holding out her hand for the first time.

Bertie took it, because she was a woman, and in trouble, but he felt very indignant.

"It's a good thing, especially as my friends seem ready enough to believe any evil against me!" he said, bitterly, as his face flushed.

"No, I assure you, that's not the case; only when you stayed away, and sent no answer to Eva's letter—"

"I did send one!"

"It never came. I suppose you forgot it!"

"I didn't forget it, indeed! You must have thought me a brute. I sent it off by Baker the next morning. I couldn't do it before, as I never saw her letter till one o'clock in the morning!"

"I wish Eva had known this!"

"Can't I see her? Is she upstairs?"

"Yes. She has not been quite so well during the last few days. But I suppose she will like to see you!"

"I suppose she will," and Bertie smiled, conclusions of his power in that direction.

"Perhaps I had better go and prepare her?" hesitatingly.

"Surely we have got beyond that sort of thing. Let me go up and announce myself!"

Pleased at his eagerness, Lady Haughton gave way, only reminding him that she was very weak.

Bertie, grieved to think he had given pain where it would be so deeply felt, hurried upstairs, and into the boudoir, which he entered on tip-toe, as soon as he saw Eva was lying on the sofa with her eyes closed. He walked softly across the thick pile carpet, and bent over her.

The poor girl was certainly an obstacle to his happiness, but his heart went out in tenderness pity towards her, as he saw the sunken cheeks, the corners of the well-cut mouth drooping in such troubled curves, as if she had grown used to pain and sorrow.

She had not lost her beauty, but the spirit of it was changed, and the stamp of fatal delicacy was on it, instead of the strong vitality of former days. She seemed to him like some frail flower, only fit for a hothouse, fading and shrinking in the rough and blistering wind.

The exotic would be sure to fade before the day was over, and the thought flashed across him that Eva Haughton was as surely doomed to death as the hothouse flower. He stooped and laid his gold-brown moustaches on her soft white cheek close against her jetty lashes.

"Poor child!" he murmured, with infinite pity and tenderness, but the tenderness of a brother—not a lover.

The kiss was so gentle that it did not seem as if it could wake her, nor yet the two words; but an electric thrill ran through her at the sound of his voice, and she woke with quivering pulses and fluttering heart, her eyes shining with joy at the sight of his good-looking face.

Then the remembrance of her wrongs came back to her, and her expression changed to one of gentle reproach.

"Why did you desert me?"

"You did not get my letter, or you would have known."

"Then you did write!" eagerly.

"Of course I did, and told you, as you might have guessed, that I was kept away by pressing business!"

"Then you weren't at the Gatehouse as they said?" looking up into his face as if life itself depended on her answer.

"I was, but—" too truthful to hesitate a moment.

"You were!" raising herself on her elbow.

"Then go. From this day you are free!"

"Nonsense, child. I want to see a man—"

"Don't try to deceive me. Oh, heavens!" gasping wildly; "I wish I had never seen you!"

"Eva, listen! It was business!"

"Business!" in utter scorn. "Yes, to make love to Pera Clifford!"

The last words died away, and with her hand on her heart she fell back unconscious, whilst Bertie, in utter dismay, thought she was dead—his young bride dead through doubt of his faith.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Bertie rushed to the bell and rang a peal, then threw himself down on his knees beside the sofa in an agony of fear.

Lady Haughton, followed by a maid, hurried into the room, exclaiming,—

"I thought it would be too much for her. You wouldn't let me announce you. My poor, poor child!"

There was something in her manner, however, as she applied the usual restoratives, that told him his worst fears were groundless.

Eva had only fainted. He was sent out of the room, but he would not leave the house, being unwilling to go away until he had made his peace. Lord Haughton was away, or he would have liked to explain to him that he need no longer fear any scandal being raised against his future son-in-law.

It suddenly occurred to him that he could do it just as well by letter, and he sat down and wrote a full account of what had happened at Lillingworth Castle.

When he had finished it Lady Haughton came in, and told him that Eva was better, but that she would not trouble him to come upstairs.

"Indeed!" she added, gravely, "I think you must have offended her deeply, for she tells me that all is over between you."

A look of pain crossed Vyvyan's face. He would have given anything never to have been engaged, but he could not bear to part like this.

"Lady Haughton, is it my fault?" he asked after a pause. "You know that I only went to the Gatehouse on most serious business."

"Why should she mind?"

His face flushed.

"Because she is so weak and ill. She takes fancies into her head. She objects to my meeting Miss Clifford."

How the name stuck in his throat!

"Will you tell her that I only saw her the first night, when she and I and Valentine and a policeman—(could there be any room for sentiment with a policeman to look on! with a bitter smile)—were all there to watch her cousin, and to protect Graves's wife. Afterwards there were horrid details to settle, which are always kept from women, and the inquest, before which Val and I had to appear. Surely no one could think there was pleasure in all that!"

And yet in his inmost heart he knew that it did give him pleasure to do anything for Pera's father or even to be under the same roof as she was.

Oh! the rapture and the pain of that meeting at the postern, when he held her two little hands in his, and their two hearts seemed to speak to each other in the throbbing silence!

Even now his rebellious thoughts were full of it, though he told himself that he was a traitor and a scoundrel, and his eyes avoided Lady Haughton's for fear lest she should see the sudden glow in them.

"No pleasure, indeed!" she answered, happily

unconscious of what was passing in his distracted mind. "I will explain all this to my poor child, and perhaps after dinner she will consent to see you."

"I must see her," he said, resolutely. "I could not bear to go away and leave her under the impression that I was a brute. Can't I go to her at once?"

"Not for the world," with a smile at his impetuosity, for which she liked him all the better. "She is much excited, and I doubt if it would be wise to agitate her again. Still I will see what I can do later on."

"Please do your very best," he said, entreatingly, "because it drives me half-mad to be like this."

Lady Haughton did her very best, because she was in quite a fright lest the engagement should be broken off, not knowing what effect it would have on her daughter's health. But for a long while Eva was quite unmanageable. She declared that she had been cruelly deceived, that whilst she was a prisoner to her sofa Bertie was making love to Pera Clifford, and nothing would induce her to see him again that night.

He was so angry at this that he almost refused to come over the next day; but Lady Haughton appealed to his pity, and he yielded sufficiently to say that he would ride over for half-an-hour before mass.

When he came in, with his head in the air, and his face as grave as a judge, Eva looked up at him with so pathetic an appeal in her large dark eyes, that his hauteur vanished like snow in the sun.

Bertie had an intensely lovable disposition, so placable, so ready to forgive at the first advance, that a quarrel rarely lasted long with him, and he held out his hand with a smile.

"Well, Eva, so you see I was not such a wretch after all!"

"Forgive me, Bertie!" the tears rushing to her eyes. "If I were able to get about like other people I shouldn't be so fainful; but I lie here with all sorts of fancies coming into my head, and it seemed to me as if you had kept away for months."

"Yes, dearest, I understand," and his arm went round her neck, and his lips were pressed to her cheek, and her tired head sank down on his shoulders.

She asked for nothing more but his presence, and felt supremely happy, because he was near.

Months passed away. First came autumn with equinoctial gales and drenching showers, then winter with terrible cold and biting frosts. Eva lingered on, not making much advance.

"In the winter she will be stronger," said her mother; and when December came, and brought but little improvement, she hoped that the spring would bring her child new life as it did for the flowers.

In March it seemed as if her hopes were to be realised, for Eva rallied so much that the wedding-day was fixed for the tenth of April. A lovely trousseau was ordered from the best shops, and dressmakers came from London to fit on one exquisite garment after the other.

All the roundness of her figure had gone, and the modistes were prepared to supply any amount of padding to make up for deficiencies.

"What a ghost I look!" said Eva, contemplating her wasted image in the glass, with disappointed eyes.

"Only the more elegant, miss!" affirmed the dressmaker; "and we will make it all right by means of the proper adjuncts. Captain Vyvyan will, indeed, be proud of his bride!"

Bertie was a captain now, and Valentine was thinking he ought to be a major, which was quite ridiculous of him, as majors are always more than seven-and-twenty.

Lady Hargreave carried Pera off to Paris with her for a thorough change. Never having been out of England before, she enjoyed it very much, and soon became her own bright, happy self.

Captain Valentine joined them, and flirted with every pretty French girl he came across, till Lady Hargreave made up her mind that her favourite scheme could never be realised, as he was sure to throw himself away on a foreigner.

He was still a little sore at having found out that Vyryan and Para were hopelessly attached to each other, and was trying to make himself like someone else better.

In this he was sure to succeed, as he was not the sort of man to be passionately in love when no encouragement was given; all the same, he was not disposed to be flattered by the facile devotion of many of the Warburton belles.

He was obliged to leave Paris before the others, as he had promised Vyryan to be his best man, and they were not going to return till after the tenth.

The wedding was to take place in the private chapel in the park, and the bishop of the diocese—a relation of Lady Haughton's—was to perform the ceremony.

Bartie, looking harassed and worried, met Val at the station, and they drove back to barracks together.

"Well, old fellow, and how have you been getting on?" he asked with a cordial grip of Captain Valentine's hand.

"First class—and you? How do you feel—like a convict going to be executed?"

"Like the luckiest man on earth!" turning away his face.

"Seriously!—how is Miss Haughton?"

"Getting along splendidly. She dines downstairs now, and talks of dancing at the balls in the Elysée when wages over the water. By-the-by, I'm commissioned to bring you to Haughton at once. We both dine there."

"Whew! First night! I've such a heap to tell them all. I was looking forward to men."

"Pat it off till to-morrow."

"I shall have drunk too much cham. in the middle of the day."

Of course he went, because he wouldn't desert Vyryan, and they had a very cheerful evening, in spite of all the skeletons in the cupboard.

For the first time for many a long day there was a lovely hectic flush on Eva's cheeks as she sat by her lover's side—her eyes sparkling with joy.

Her soft laugh rang out joyously in answer to some amusing remark of Val's, and her mother looked at her with fond delight.

Evidently her prescription had answered splendidly, and Bartie Vyryan, with his handsome face and pleasant ways, had done more good than all the medicine in the world. Still prudence was necessary, and she advised Eva to go to bed early, in order to prepare for the fatigues of the morrow.

But the young bride was so perfectly happy that she could not bear to shorten the evening unnecessarily, and when Lady Haughton became too persistent in her advice, she drew Bartie away into the conservatory.

"I want to give you something for your buttonhole to-morrow, which hasn't come out of a shop."

"Your flowers will come from Covent Garden, I'm afraid you will have to put up with it," he said, with a smile.

"So long as you give them, do you suppose I shall care?" she answered, with a loving look over her shoulder, as she stooped to pick some lilies of the valley.

She twisted a piece of her hair round the stems and held them out to him. Then changing her mind, she put them into his coat with her own fingers, placing a piece of fern behind the frail white blossoms.

"Now, promise me one thing!" she said, earnestly. "I want you to keep them as long as you live!"

"They shall be kept as long as my life lasts; and, perhaps, if you survive me, your own little hands shall put them in my coffin," looking down into her face with a smile.

Though she was delicate through illness just at present, she might last the longest of the two—for there would be no risks in her life as there would in his, if he gained the wish of his heart, and went on active service.

"No, no!" she said, hastily; "we must go together, or I must go first. I won't be left behind!"

Then she rested her head against his coat, and

he bent down till his cheek rested on her forehead, and there was silence between them, each thinking his or her thoughts, which were too deep for words.

The clock of the chapel struck eleven in silvery tones. Bartie started,—

"I must go."

"Not yet!"

"Indeed, I must! I've half-a-hundred things to see after! Good-bye, dear, till to-morrow!" then taking her face between his hands, he kissed her lips.

"Oh, Bartie! my own—own Bartie!" and she wound her white arms round his neck.

"After to-morrow there will be no good-byes!"

"That is not much of one," with a smile;

"only till to-morrow!"

So they parted.

He took her to the foot of the stairs by her own wish, and she looked back at him fondly when she came to the first turning—a pretty graceful figure, seeming in her white dress, like the lily of the valley in his bottomhole.

He waved his hand to her and turned away, satisfied that he had played his part bravely.

That night he tore up and set fire to a few formal notes he had received from Para, and threw the withered yellow roses into the blazing heap.

It seemed to him that his own heart was being tortured by the flame as he watched its shrivel and blacken. So ended the sweetest chapter of his life. To-morrow he must begin another!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was Lady Haughton's invariable habit to pay a visit to her daughter's room before retiring finally for the night. However late, or however unwell, she never omitted it, feeling that she could not rest comfortably unless she knew how her child was.

On this, the last night before the wedding, she had so much to say to Bartie that he was not able to leave the house till after twelve. She bade him good-night at last, with a pleasant feeling in her anxious heart.

If she must give up her daughter to anyone, it was an immense comfort to know that her future husband was a thorough gentleman, with one of the kindest hearts in the world.

As the two brother-officers drove homewards, both of them rather oppressed by the gravity of the situation, Lady Haughton, in her crimson dressing gown trimmed with plush, came softly along the corridor and opened Eva's door. To her surprise the room was brightly lighted, candles still burning on the toilette table, a silver lamp on the mantelpiece, when she knew that Eva could not endure a ray of light after she was in bed. But one glance at the bed showed her that she had not yet begun to rest. It was vexatious, and Lady Haughton heaved a displeased sigh, as she pushed open the door of the dressing-room.

She must send her to bed at once, or she would never be fit for anything the next day. As the door slowly yielded to her hand, a sight met her eyes which, for years of sorrow and regret, was photographed on her brain.

Eva, clothed in a snow-white wrapper, was kneeling at her prayers, her graceful figure drooping like a snow-drop, her small dark head resting against the crimson cushion of the sofa.

The lace curtains of the window seemed to make a sort of shrine in the background, round a beautiful alabaster statuette of an angel.

The angel's wings were outstretched as if ready to bear a soul from earth, and in his hand was a lily, which the young bride of the morrow had worn that night!

"It is like a lovely picture," thought Lady Haughton, "but I must not let the child be up any longer. Eva dear," she said, softly, "it is getting late."

There was no movement in answer to her gentle appeal; and unwilling to break in upon her devotions with another remark, Lady Haughton contented herself with fidgeting about the room, putting out some of the lights, and picking

up a handkerchief which was lying on the floor, &c., &c. Then she gave a loud yawn, and sat down on the sofa, letting her thoughts stray backwards over the past nine months, and after a while, almost forgetting how the time was passing, as she thought of the fearful anxiety she had been through, and rejoiced over the happy ending in a wedding which seemed sure to secure her happiness.

One of the candles which had burnt low in its socket suddenly lost all stamina in its wick, and went out. Lady Haughton was roused from her reverie by the darkening of the room, and got up, shocked at the lateness of the hour. "Eva must be asleep," she thought, and going up to her she laid her hand lovingly on her shoulder.

"Child, you must come to bed, or you will be fit for nothing to-morrow."

No answer.

"Eva!" a little louder. No movement—only utter stillness; even the lace which covered her chest was not stirred by a breath. So still—so cold—so mute! What did it mean! Had she fainted!

The mother clasped her hands against her breast, and gasped. Oh, Heaven! it could not be. She was so much better. Only a little while ago she was laughing—and now! She was tired out, but that would soon pass, and she would be quite well to-morrow.

She must get up from her knees at once—the attitude was exhausting, even for people who were strong. Then with hands that shook as if with palsy, Lady Haughton tried to raise her up, but a sudden heaviness and stiffness seemed to have come into the slight figure which was generally supple as a young willow. Then she stooped, her panic growing greater, her breath coming fast, her heart almost standing still, and looked into her daughter's face. The next moment a cry of bitter agony rang through the house—"Oh, Heaven, my child!" and the mother, in heartbroken anguish, sank on the floor.

Yes, Eva Haughton was dead! Called away on the eve of her bridal, when life seemed to be so radiant with happiness as to form a perfect reflex of Heaven—she had gone, with her wedding-dress lying on the chair beside her, in its beauty of lace and pearl-embroidered satin, destined never to be worn—with her lover waiting but a few miles off, ready to give her his name, and devote his life to her, on the morrow; with every hope on the point of fruition—every wish on the eve of attainment. She had gone; and neither the love of father, mother, nor bridegroom could call her back!

"Oh! the pity of it!" cried those who had loved her, forgetting that she had died in the zenith of her happiness, before she had time to see it wane—before she had known the chill of disappointment—before she had watched the vanishing of her illusions—and gone to a better land, where there was no grief, no pain, no possibility of failure.

To Bartie Vyryan the news of his release came as a fearful shock. He hurried to Haughton, and the tears rolled down his cheeks as he looked upon the quiet calm beauty of the face which had rested on his shoulder so lovingly the night before, and knew that never again would it smile into his—never again would those eyes, now closed so hermetically, look into his with unquenchable love in their glorious depths.

Poor child! She had loved him, he thought, far better than he deserved; and, as he knelt down and murmured a prayer, his heart was full of remorse for slight acts of carelessness during their engagement—small acts which would have sat lightly on his conscience if there had been any possibility of future amends.

The lilies of the valley, which she had given him, were put in an envelope, and hidden away in a safe place. He resolved that he would never part with them, even if another wife ever stood by his side—even if the love of another completely filled his heart.

He had given his pledge to Eva, and when he was dead—unless he died on the field of battle, when it might not be possible—they should rest in his coffin—a last memorial of



"NOW, PROMISE ME TO KEEP THEM AS LONG AS YOU LIVE!" SHE SAID.

the passionate love which only ended with her life.

Once again the spring came round with prim-roses, starting the grass with pale yellow sun-shine. The White Lancers had long ago moved their quarters, and their tall forms were no longer to be seen lounging in the High-street.

Captain Godfrey Valentine had gone to York, after breaking the hearts of many Warburton beauties, and Bertie Vyvyan had accompanied him, with the rest of his comrades, much to the regret of Lady Houghton, who had grown to love him like a son.

Paul Le Mesurier, having experienced the cold shoulder quite long enough, and having utterly failed in his schemes against his rival, exchanged into another regiment—not very long before the White Lancers received orders to embark for Egypt. Active service! The very thought gave new life to Bertie; and rejoiced the heart of Val.

He was growing *blasé*, he said, and wanted distractions, being tired of horses, girls, and flirtations. There was one thing he must do before leaving England, and that was—run down to Warburton, and say good-bye to Lady Hargrave.

He proposed to Vyvyan to come with him; but he intimated, in common parlance, that he had other fish to fry, so they started together one lovely day, when the green buds were bursting, and the birds were singing joyously—and parted at Warburton station.

Lady Hargrave was delighted to see "her boy," and made as much of him as an elderly lady can; and Pera, who was staying at the Hall for one short week, behaved very prettily to him, and laughed softly at his smallest joke.

She had a new gown on of pale grey cashmere, which was infinitely becoming, and Val thought Bertie was an ass not to have come and made use of this last opportunity.

Lady Hargrave inquired after him, and was told he had gone to Houghton; but Pera said

nothing, as she bent over her work with a richer colour in her cheeks.

"If he had cared for me one tiniest bit," she thought bitterly, "he would never have gone away without bidding me good-bye!"

Somehow she felt "out of it" that evening and was glad to steal into the garden by herself, and leave Val alone with his dear old friend.

There was perfect friendship between those two, and there were so many things they had to say to one another on this their last night together.

He sat on a stool by Lady Hargrave's side, and every now and then, when nobody was supposed to be looking, she put out her small white hand, with the diamonds sparkling on her fingers and laid it tenderly on his short-cropped, sunny curls. Ah! how the memory of his father clung to her still, and made her heart go out in tenderness to his son!

"She is richer than I," thought Pera, as she sat on the low wall. "I have no friend devoted to me, and papa finds perfect consolation for my absence in his books. I'm just one of those solitary girls who might go into a sisterhood and never be missed."

The stars came out one by one, and all the sounds in the valley grew silent. There was the noise of wheels on the ground—probably the fly which was to take Captain Valentine to the station; but that was not to come till half-past ten, and she had no idea that it was so late. Perhaps she had better go in.

She got up from her seat, and looked down into the valley, through which the river was winding like a silver thread, with here and there a dark shadow thrown across it, like in her own life.

"Miss Clifford, Pera! I've been to the Gate-house, but you weren't there," said the voice she loved better than any other, the voice of Bertie, and all in a moment the shadows seemed to vanish, as she turned round breathlessly.

Her hands were in his, her heart beating fast, but still she had not said a word. He was there,

that was quite enough—there was no need to ask a question.

"You've heard that we are off!"

She bent her head.

"But I could not go till I had seen you!" his voice husky with deep emotion. "Darling! there's one thing I want to ask you—when come back will you be my wife?"

"I don't know," her chest heaving, her lips trembling. "You mayn't care—how can I tell?"

"Pera, when you know that I have never loved anyone else, not even Eva!" his tone low and hushed. "Tell me quick, for Heaven's sake. I've lived in this hope for years."

Her eyes slowly raised themselves to his, and the next moment his arms were round her trembling figure and his eager kisses on her lips.

"Ah! when I come back," he said in a whisper, "there will be nobody so happy as you and I. Darling, to think I've got you at last!" and tears of rapturous joy were shining in his eyes.

Parted so long by Bernard Vanaltart's Secret Sin, there was nothing to divide them now, but the risks and dangers of a soldier's life.

The campaign came to an end as all things do in this world. Bertie came home and sold out. A quiet wedding followed, and though years have come and gone he and Pera are supremely happy. Val has never married, and is still the beau of the regiment, as gay and brilliant as ever, and always a welcome guest at Bird's home.

[THE END.]

A COMBINED door knob and bell is among the latest inventions. A button is arranged in the door-knob and connected by a spiral spring to a bell on the inside. When the button is pressed, the spring actuates a pair of clappers, which strike a bell or gong.



"SOMETHING TELLS ME THAT NELL'S LOVER IS REGINALD DENZIL!" SAID SIR GUY.

VERNON'S DESTINY.

CHAPTER VI.

It has been hinted before in this story that the Travers family were poor. Isola herself always admitted the fact. Sir Guy had glanced at it when he spoke of her relations to his mother, but neither of these casual observations can give the slightest idea of the state of impecuniosity to which the unlucky tribe had sunk.

I use the word "tribe" advisedly; it was Lieutenant Travers's own; he always asserted his children were too numerous for any other designation.

I am quite aware that it is not etiquette for a gentleman so low down in the profession, to flout his military rank on all occasions; but, alas! this same humble, military title was Gilbert Travers's sole claim to respectability.

He really came of gentle blood, and his wife had been a lady; but (and this was a large comprehensive but) they had had to make so many shifts, to have resort to so many queer contrivances, to go through such prodigious courses of "humble pie," that they would never have proclaimed their origin with a chance of its being credited, but for the poor little title they clung to so perseveringly as the last relic of "better days."

The version of the family history given forth was, that the Lieutenant had been in a crack regiment of the line (they never by any chance specified which regiment) in his youth, but the charges of a numerous family had made it impossible for him to continue in such an expensive position.

He had, therefore, sold his commission, and the interest of the sum thus raised and of his wife's little fortune brought in his present slender income.

I don't know how many of his listeners believed this story; it was the purest fiction to begin with. Mrs. Travers never had a penny of

fortune, and if she had had her husband would have spent the principal in a very brief space. As to the price of the commission, that had gone at once to defray "debts of honour."

The family literally had no income; they lived like the birds of the air, from hand to mouth, and Mrs. Travers suffered under those extra cares which do not afflict the mother of a feathered brood; her tribe required house-rent, clothes and education, and what is more wonderful, they got it—after a fashion.

For some years past the tribe had resided at Beauville-sur-Mer. It was cheap, it was cheerful, and there was a chance of the Lieutenant picking up an adversary at *court*, or other games—a thing which generally proved a calamity to the adversary and a blessing to a tribe.

Rex, the eldest hope, took leave of his family in November with the intention of sailing at once to Sydney; three of the boys had left the nest, and were keeping their head fairly above water in distant towns.

Isola (whose age was far nearer Sir Guy's reckoning than her own) had made a grand match, so there were only nine young ones at home to be clothed, fed, and run into debt for.

It was a day or two before the expedition to Reglan Castle, and Lena Ince Travers, usually called Lit from her initials, sat at her mother's side, eagerly discussing Major Merton's letter of invitation.

She was as unlike Isola as she well could be. Isola had been the family idol, at whose shrine everyone was expected to worship.

Lit was the family drudge, who always seemed to have the hardest blows of fate dealt out to her. Lit had quite a genius for appealing frate tradespeople, and making a sovereign go as far as two.

She had almost a Frenchwoman's taste in dress, and attired her younger sisters prettily out of next to nothing. She was such a good cook that if, on a specially busy occasion the family ventured to "entertain," her services were always retained in the kitchen. Half the people

who talked of the "Travers' girls" had never seen the second girl.

It was a trifle awkward while Isola was at home, and posing as an *ingenue* of eighteen, to produce a younger sister, who owned to being two-and-twenty; so poor Lit was judiciously kept in the background.

"You can't go!" said Mrs. Travers, decidedly. "It's quite out of the question! Your father could never afford your travelling expenses! Besides, think of your clothes—a pretty disgrace it would be to Isola to show such a sister to her friends!"

"I should like to go!" returned Lit, speaking with unusual pertinacity. "I have been wanting to go to London for a long time!"

Had the town clock in the market-place of Beauville-sur-Mer suddenly spoken of having long cherished a desire to visit the English metropolis, Mrs. Travers could not have felt much more surprised.

"Whatever for?"

"That's my business!"

"Isa doesn't live in London!"

"No; but I could easily take a day there in passing through to Monmouthshire! I should like to go mother! It is such a kind letter, and I like Major Merton so much!"

"How do you know Isa wants you?"

"She would not have let him invite me if it was against her wishes," said poor Lit, never suspecting the Major had intended her visit as a pleasing surprise for his wife. "You know Isa always has her own way. He says they have been preparing a charming surprise for me. Mother do let me go! I am two-and-twenty, you know, and have never been anywhere in my whole life!"

Mrs. Travers relented just a little. It was so true; the family Cinderella had very little taste of even such pleasures as came to the rest of the tribe.

"It's the money, Lit, and your dress!"

"I don't mind the dress!" said Lit, in her resolute way. "I always look tidy, and Major

Merton knew we were poor enough when he married Isa."

"I think he might have helped us just a little. Such a rich man as he is—a few bank-notes would have been nothing to him!"

"I think he meant to help us."

"What do you mean, Lit?"

"I always thought when he gave Isa that handsome allowance he meant some of it to come to us. Jim is such a true gentleman, I fancy he could not bear to offer us money himself, and thought we should not mind taking it from Isa."

"She has never offered it."

"Never! Isa has a knack of spending money, you see, mother."

"Well, it's her own," said Mrs. Travers, who could never bear to hear her darling blamed; "and I'm sure she paid a pretty price for it, marrying a man old enough to be her father."

"It was her own free choice."

"Because she could not bear the stings of poverty; she was a fragile blossom."

No answer. Lit had her own opinion of Isa's character. Mrs. Travers felt this, and resented the silence.

"Perhaps you think your sister married for money? I dare say, miss, in your own mind you call her mercenary."

"She did not marry for anything else," said Lit, sadly. "How could she when she loved Reginald Densill with every fibre of her heart. To my mind, mother, it would have been honest to have married him."

"Marry Densill! a ne'er-do-well, who never did a day's work in his life, who lived upon his high connections and good looks; a man who has gone utterly to the bad, and been cut by all his friends!"

"He was not a good man," admitted Lit; "but he was never so very bad until Isa jilted him."

"I won't have you abuse your sister!"

"Well, you know it was that. They were engaged, and if Major Merton had never come here I think Isa would have married the Captain. I know he did a great many bad things, but he just worshipped the ground she walked on; her loss made him reckless."

Mrs. Travers stirred the fire, and hesitated. She had something she wished to say, and she hardly knew how to begin.

"I suppose she never mentions him to you, Lit, in her letters—Densill, I mean."

"Never."

"He is in England somewhere, I know that much. Lit, it would be an awful thing if he and Isa ever met!"

"They are not likely to meet, mother; Densill has been too reckless ever to gain admittance into general society, and the Major knows enough of his career (though he has no idea of his passion for Isa) to shut his doors upon him."

"I know; but I don't feel easy, Lit."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I don't know. I dreamed of Isa last night, and she seemed to be in some great peril. Now, Lit, no danger for her could be so fearful as a meeting with Captain Densill."

"I know."

"She has never asked any of us there—never even given a hint she would like to see us—and it makes me anxious."

"Well, here is the chance for me to set your mind at ease. You had better let me accept the Major's invitation."

"But the money?"

"It can all be done for five pounds, and I have that in my purse."

"Lit!"

"Don't look as if I had been stealing, mother; the money is honestly mine. You shall hear all about it some day. Well, may I write to the Major and tell him I shall be at Obesetow on Thursday afternoon?"

"So soon?"

"I think so. I can leave here on Tuesday by the night boat. That will give me all day Wednesday in London."

"What do you want to do?"

"No harm! I can sleep at old Anna's, mother, and you know you can trust me."

"Yes. You are not like my lovely Isa. You are quite able to take care of yourself! You look years older than you are!"

This was a libel. Lit looked no more than her age, twenty-two. She was of middle height, had a fresh, clear complexion, brown hair, and nice thoughtful grey eyes. She was the only one of the tribe who never alluded to "better days" and the high estate from which the family had fallen, and yet of all the nine sisters she had most the imprint of refinement. Lit might be shabby and look out of fashion, but her dress was always neat and becoming, and fitted her like a glove. She was twenty-two, and had never had a lover in her life; never had an existence apart from the rest of the tribe. Many people were fairly intimate with her sisters who had never seen her. She was proverbially the home one of the brood, and this journey to Monmouthshire was the first time she had tried her wings.

Old Anna had been nurse in the Travers' palmy days; she had married a grocer, and settled very comfortably in a street out of the Tottenham Court-road. Of all the children Miss Lit had been her favourite, and though there had been no meeting with Mrs. Wilson for several years, the girl felt quite confident of a warm welcome.

And she received it. This buxom widow patted her nursing of other days, and wept over her in the heartiest fashion. Indeed, her manner was an alternate struggle between respect and affection. She had confined the shop to her assistant for the express purpose of receiving Lit, and yet it required the young lady's most strenuous persuasion to make her sit down to breakfast with her, as she declared she felt as if she were taking a liberty the whole time.

"It's rare time for me to get a sight of you, Miss Lit! You and Master Reginald were always my favourites. Not a bit of pride about either of you. If you'd believe me, Miss Lit, the young master took tea with me the very last night he was in England, and nothing would please him but I should run down to Gravesend to see him off. He said it made him feel less lonesome."

"Of course it did, you dear old thing. Oh! is it really ten o'clock! I must be going out. I have two or three places to call at."

"Is it shopping you're after, Miss Lit?"

"Yes; selling, not buying, Anne! Don't you remember those letters you've taken in for me these last few months, and sent on in another envelope! Mother used to wonder why you wrote so often."

"I remember right enough, Miss Lit. I began to think you had got a lover of your own; and sure it's a wonder to me you weren't married long before Miss Isa, with all her airs and graces!"

"Isa is a beauty!" said Lit, simply; "and you know, nurse, I was always the ugly one!"

"I know nothing of the kind, Miss Lit—besides, 'handsome is as handsome does,' I think!"

"Well, I haven't got a lover, and I don't suppose I ever shall; but you know how poor we are, nurse, so it's delightful to have found out a way of earning money."

"Bless me, Miss Lit, you ought never to have to think of money at your age."

"I have had to think of money all my life, nurse. You know I used to tell fairy tales to the tribe long ago. Well, it came into my head one day, other people might like to read the things I was always dreaming about; and so I just put two or three of them down on paper, and—"

"And printed them!" gasped Mrs. Wilson.

"Oh, Miss Lit, only to think of that!"

"Not at all, nurse! I didn't print them! I sold them to the editor of a magazine, and he wrote to say if ever I were passing through London I was to call on him, as he thought he could give me an order for more."

"And that's where you're going now, Miss Lit?"

"Yes; and to see an old friend of mother's nurse. I wonder what editors are like!"

"Much the same as other folks, only rather

inky," suggested Mrs. Wilson, equably. "You'd better have a cab, Miss Lit, that can take you to the very door. It's much too cold for you to go wandering about!"

Lit felt her courage sinking into her shoes as the cab neared Fleet-street. She fully shared the fears of John Glyn's wife at being thought proud; so rather more than "three doors off" the horse "was stayed," and Lit, her precious manuscript in her hand, wandered down a very gloomy-looking court until she came to a house a little taller and more dismal looking than its fellows, which a large plate over the door informed her was the office of the "Royal London Monthly Paper."

Lit marched upstairs, her heart going pit-a-pat in the most unpleasant fashion. It was a more trying affair than soothing the frate landlord at home, or pleading with the baker not to cut off the family supply of rolls because his bill had been disregarded; but Lit went bravely on, and at last knocked at a door on the second-floor inscribed Editor's Room—a very small clerk opened it, and stared with youthful severity at Lit.

"You can't see Mr. Gordon, he's particularly engaged this morning!"

"I will wait!" returned Miss Travers, politely. "Perhaps you can take him my card, and say that I only came from France yesterday!"

The distance impressed the youth, and he condescended to take the card, which bore the *nom de plume* of Conilly; he also relented sufficiently as to usher Lit into a little room opposite where a bright fire was burning, and offer her a chair.

Miss Travers sat down and began to warm her feet; she was so comfortably engaged in this occupation that she was quite surprised when the summons came.

"Mr. Gordon will see you now, miss!"

Two gentlemen were in the sanctum where Lit presently found herself; one, an elderly man, bowed with quiet civility, the other greeted her with hearty surprise.

"Miss Travers, is it possible?"

"Sir Gay Vernon!"

"Ah, Gordon!" said the Baronet to his manager, "I think you had better see some of your visitors in the next room; this young lady and I are old acquaintances, and I think I shall be more powerful even than you in securing her services for the Royal!"

The elderly individual hardly relished this address, but he vanished with great docility. Lit and the Baronet found themselves alone.

"I don't understand!" said Lit, bewildered.

"What have you got to do with Mr. Gordon?"

"Confidence for confidence, Miss Travers. As you use a *nom de plume* I fancy you don't want it known that you dabble in literature. Well, I want the fact that I am the proprietor of a magazine kept secret, so I have Mr. Gordon to represent me before the public."

"Then the Royal belongs to you?"

"It does."

"I am so sorry."

"And why?"

"Mr. Gordon wrote to me so kindly, I had hoped I had a chance of—"

She stopped, Gay smiled.

"Gordon never wrote to you, Miss Travers. I wrote to 'Conilly,' and whatever promises I made her I am quite ready to redeem to you!"

"But you hate us, don't you know! Have you forgotten about—Captain Densill?"

"I have not forgotten!" returned Gay, quickly, "and my opinion of your sister has never changed. I regard Mrs. Merton as a disgrace to womanhood; but, Miss Travers, I know that you are made of different metal. I have only met you once before, but I would stake my word that you are loyal and true."

"I try to be."

"Well, let us forget your connection with Mrs. Merton, and plunge into business. Do you know I think you have found your walk in life! The moment I read the November number of the Royal I wrote to Gordon and told him to hunt you up, and attach you to us if possible."

"I should like it dearly. Oh! Sir Gay, things

have gone very badly at home lately. I have given up the hope of their ever getting better. If I can earn just a little, so as to make the children's life easier, that is all I want."

"Does not Mrs. Merton help you?"

"I do not think Isola realises how we need help, and I am glad of it."

"Why?"

Lit shuddered.

"I don't want to judge my sister hastily, but you have been behind the scenes; you know all."

"I suspect a good deal."

"You know that her marriage was one of interested motives. It seems to me, if Isa gave us her money, I should feel as if I had helped her to sell herself, and were sharing the price."

"I understand."

"I suppose you have seen a great deal of them since they went to the Park?"

"I have seen Mrs. Merton once. I was so unfortunate as to miss your brother; I called on him twice, but he was out, and, though I asked him to dinner he refused my invitation. I thought it a little curious."

"Do you mean Rex?"

"To be sure."

"But he was only in London two days," said Lit, simply; "he had so little money, you know, and it is a very expensive journey to Monmouthshire."

Guy looked troubled.

"Miss Travers, we are at cross-purposes. Don't you ever hear from her sister?"

"Oh, yes. Isa writes sometimes. I am going to stay with them to-morrow; the Major asked me himself, in such a kind letter, I feel I can go without minding; he says he and Isa have a pleasant surprise for me. I wonder what it can be!"

"Your brother is at the Park; he has been there more than a month; that is why I thought it strange he declined my invitation, and never returned either of my calls."

"Reginald?"

"Of course. He is the only one of your brothers I am acquainted with—a good fellow, Miss Travers, though his own enemy."

Lit had left her chair. She stood in front of Sir Guy with a white, scared face and trembling hands.

"There is some terrible mistake!"

"Not at all," said Guy, thinking she was trying to apologise for her brother's rudeness. "Of course, I understand your sister prejudiced him against me."

"But Rex never went to Merton Park; he sailed for Sydney just before Christmas. Oh, Sir Guy! He did, indeed!"

"But he is at the Park now, I assure you of it. No doubt Mrs. Merton persuaded him at the last moment to change his mind; anyway, he arrived at the Park on the twentieth of December. I remember the date well, because it was two days before I returned to Vernon Grange after a long absence. Depend upon it, Miss Travers, he did not like to write and tell you he had changed his mind. You will find him at the Park, and, that is the pleasant surprise in store for you."

But Lit's colour did not return; she scared look lingered in her eyes.

"I am staying with our old nurse," she said, simply; "Mrs. Wilson. She has a little shop near the Tottenham Court-road, and she told me herself Rex would make her go to Gravesend to see him off!"

"That is strange, certainly; but I believe all the outward bound vessels call at Plymouth. He may have left the ship there!"

"I don't think he did."

Guy grew impatient.

"Miss Travers, what would you imply? I tell you your brother is at Merton Park, its master's honoured guest. He has been received by the whole county; has made himself generally popular, and is, rumour says, to marry Major Merton's ward, a young girl of large fortune and great beauty!"

Lit threw up her hands.

"Then I am right, and it cannot be my brother. Rex is engaged to a dear little creature—half

French, half English—who lives near us. I know he would never have gathered up his courage and made such a sacrifice as to go to Australia but for the hope of making a home for his Estace. She has been in Paris, staying with her grandfather, or I could tell you positively she heard from him from Plymouth, which would solve all doubts!"

She started. What had she said? What had happened? The fear in her own face was stamped now upon Sir Guy's. An anguish greater than words can describe was written on his brow. He half staggered against the wall as he muttered,—

"Heaven help her, poor child!"

"Who?"

"Nell—Miss Charteris! I am certain she was on the eve of marriage with the man who passed as Reginald Travers!"

"Did you not see him?"

"I have told you I made several efforts to do so, and fail each time. Of course I understand it all now!"

"I don't!"

"You soon will. Your sister—I can't speak of her without loathing—trusting to the fact that her husband and her eldest brother had never met, to the fact of Mr. Travers being a stranger to Monmouthshire, introduced someone else in his character. I suppose I was the only person who could betray her, and she took care to keep her pretended brother secure from my inspection!"

"It is awful!"

"Terrible! What can the man be like who would steal into Major Merton's house under a false name! who would claim a position of intimacy with Mrs. Merton by pretending to her husband that he was her brother!"

Lit was speechless. For weeks she had cherished a dim foreboding that all was not right with Isola; but of such an awful deception as this she had never dreamed. It was too terrible!

"She is barely nineteen!" groaned Guy Vernon; "a perfect child. Just think what her life must be, linked to such a villain! Miss Travers, if you have any womanly compassion in your heart, you will go straight to Merton Park, expose the awful fraud that has been perpetrated, and save Miss Charteris while there is time!"

"I shall be at the Park to-morrow. I would go to-day, but there is no train now till the afternoon, and surely a day's delay can make no difference."

"I suppose not"—gloomily—"but I tremble for Miss Charteris!"

"And I grieve for Major Merton," said Lit, sadly. "He is just wrapped up in Isola. What will he feel when he knows how she has deceived him?"

"He must know it; the fraud cannot go on. Think of that poor child!"

"I do," said Lit, gravely. "No; I know that the Major must know all, and I will go to Monmouthshire to-day, if you insist upon it, but I would rather wait!"

"What difference can a day make?"

"Isola is very clever. She would know that the moment I reach the Park her plot must be discovered. I think she will find some way of humiliating the man she calls her brother before I get there!"

"And then—"

"I will tell all to Miss Charteris. It is hard to expose one's sister"—here Lit sighed—"but I have no right to sacrifice another. Miss Charteris shall know all; only I should like, if it were possible, to spare the Major."

"And you will go to-morrow, whatever happens! Mrs. Merton is quite capable of sending a telegram to stop you!"

"Isola does not know where I am. I will go to-morrow, at any cost. I am willing to start to-night, if you think it necessary."

"No," he admitted; "four-and-twenty hours' delay can hardly matter. Nell is not the girl to rush into matrimony with lightning speed, and their engagement is not a week old."

"Do you know her?"

"I have met her twice."

"And she is the Major's ward?"

"Yes, and an ardent admirer of your sister's."

I'm afraid I behaved like a brute to her, poor little thing; but she was such a child. It seemed hard she should grow up like—like Mrs. Merton!"

There were tears in Lit's honest eyes.

"Isola would not have been so bad had she married Hugh Denzil!"

"He was a scoundrel!"

Lit hesitated.

"He was not a good man, but he loved her and she loved him. I think if they had been married the very strength of their love might have purified their nature. Now that very love is their curse!"

"Where is Denzil?"

"He has been hunted from Monaco for failing to pay his debts of honour. Father said he didn't suppose there was a respectable man who would speak to him."

"Where is he now?" persisted Sir Guy.

"I don't know."

"Is he in England?"

"I should say so. I know he crossed from Beauville in the beginning of December; it was long after the Major and Isola had gone home. Mother felt thankful they were not in London, lest there should have been any fear of Captain Denzil and Isola meeting."

Sir Guy looked thoughtfully into the fire; he was asking himself a question which tortured him.

"Lit," he said suddenly, without the slightest consciousness he was calling the girl by her familiar home name, "I think you and I have the same fear. Tell me, what do you believe the false Mr. Travers's real name to be?"

Lit kept silence, but her fingers played nervously with the fastenings of her jacket.

"Shall I put it differently? Don't you think that Captain Denzil has stolen your mother's name?"

She bowed her head.

"We have no proof of it," went on the strong man, sadly; "but there are some things one feels sure of without proof, Lit," and he laid one hand upon his heart. "Something tells me that Nell's lover is Reginald Denzil!"

A long pause fell on them. The court was a quiet one, but little frequented. The second floor was sacred to the editor of the "Royal" and his visitors.

Mr. Gordon, wondering at the length of his chief's interview with "Conilly," had gone to lunch, the boy-clerk was munching sandwiches in the little waiting-room; there was a silence almost as of death in the room where Guy and Lit sat alone with her trouble.

To her life's end she never forgot that room. Years after she could have described its furniture to the minutest detail, but now she saw the man's face under its load of sorrow, its burden of pain.

He had never said a word betraying affection for Nell Charteris, had stated expressly he had only seen her twice; and yet Lit knew as well as possible that he loved her—that he would have sacrificed all he had in the world to save her from falling a prey to Denzil.

There are women in the world who have never been beloved, who may never have felt the sacred passion themselves, and who can yet distinguish it at a glance in others—aye, and sympathise with it too. Such a one was Lit.

Very timidly she put one hand on Sir Guy Vernon's arm.

"Shall I go to Merton Park to-night? I think we are both so anxious the suspense will be hard to bear. I can just go back for my luggage, and be at Paddington in an hour."

Guy roused himself.

"It would be of no use. You would not be at the Park before ten. It would only create a needless scandal and disturbance. You had better keep to your original plan."

"And you?"

"I am going home to-morrow, perhaps. You will allow me to be your escort? There is a fast train about ten. I will telegraph for a carriage to meet us; and, with your permission, will drive you to Merton Park."

"Thank you!"

She had risen, but she was trembling so terribly she could hardly stand.

"This has been too much for you," said Guy, kindly. "You are quite upset."

"I feel a pain here!" and she touched her heart. "Oh, Sir Guy! my father and mother are so proud of Isola! She is their favourite child! I think this will be their death-blow!"

"We must try and spare them! Miss Travers, I wish I could help you in your troubles—I do, indeed!"

"You can!" said Lit, very sadly. "Promise me you won't think all women like this! Isola has been spoiled from infancy, and she was so pretty no one could help it. I think she threw away her last chance of becoming really happy when she jilted Captain Deuill. She has been perfectly reckless since. I know you have little call to pity her, only don't condemn all women just because one has erred!"

"I will never condemn you!" said Vernon, feelingly; "and now you must let me put you into a cab, and go home and rest! You are looking terribly white and tired!"

Mrs. Wilson was fairly frightened when she saw her nursing and guest. In vain Lit spoke of the fatigues of London, and the excitement of interviewing editors. The poor woman was not to be put off.

"You've had bad news, Miss Lit, and that's what it is!"

"Indeed, no nurse! I have not heard a word from home or from Rex, and I met a neighbour of Isola's, who says she is very well."

"And you mean to go Monmouthshire to-morrow! You look more fit to take to your bed than go rushing off on a long journey!"

"I must go!"—oh, so wearily. "And, nurse, I have to catch the ten o'clock train, so I had better go to bed early!"

She looked very pale and tired the next morning; quite a contrast from the bright-faced girl, who had left the French boat so full of hope. Mrs. Wilson openly bemoaned; but she was too fond of Lit to persist in her questions, and only begged her to remember that whatever happened she'd always "a 'ome for her till better days dawned."

Lit clung to her humble friend, and kissed her very fondly before she got into the waiting cab.

She could not have put the feeling into words—only she seemed to know she would pass through troubled scenes before she saw that honest face again.

Sir Guy was waiting at the terminus to receive her, his servant behind him. The man took the luggage into his own charge, and Lit found herself walking forwards on the Baroness's arm. But for that awful foreboding at her heart she must have smiled to think of the little family Cinderella on such intimate terms with the high and mighty Sir Guy Vernon. What would the "tribe" say could they see her preparing for a journey under such distinguished auspices!

"I have had a carriage reserved," said Guy, suddenly. "We could not stand the gossip of strangers this morning."

The guard held open the door of a roomy first-class carriage, meant, no doubt, to accommodate eight persons, but which Sir Guy, with reckless extravagance, had made his own, as the placard "engaged" on the window testified.

Lit was comfortably installed in one corner, with a warm rug over her, and a hot-water tin for her feet. A basket of hot-house grapes, a bundle of newspapers, and a reading novel, showed Sir Guy had not been unmindful of his companion.

"We wait five minutes at Reading, and ten at Gloucester, sir," said the guard officiously. "No need to disturb you except at those stations, I suppose."

They were fairly off. Neither made the slightest attempt at conversation. Sir Guy buried his face in a newspaper. Lit closed her eyes and seemed to sleep. Really every nerve of her body was aching with dread of the scene which lay before her.

Sir Guy brought her a glass of wine at Reading, which she drank almost mechanically, and then

they exchanged their first words since the train started.

"When are we due at Chepstow?"

"Three o'clock!"

"Then we shall be at the Park by four."

"Yes; but we shall be too late!"

Lit gasped.

"Too late!"

"Don't ask me why. Don't tell me I am mistaken," cried Guy, wildly. "I know within myself that we are too late. Even now Nell Charteris is beyond our aid."

Poor Lit. Sleep was impossible. Her tongue refused all attempts at conversation. She just leant back in her corner mechanically, and longed for the time to pass more quickly, in spite of the trial awaiting her when she reached the Park.

Her very heart felt sick with yearning to be there. Anything on earth was better than this suspense—this awful forced inaction, when she could do nothing but gaze vacantly on the blank despair of her companion's face.

"We must be going very slowly," she said at last, when the tediousness of their progress seemed beyond what her own feverish impatience would account for.

"I wonder where we are! We can't be very far from Gloucester."

Sir Guy went to the window.

"Just outside a tunnel, and we seem to have come to a dead stop. I suppose we're waiting for a train to pass us."

"Then there it comes! I hear it."

Aye, she heard a train coming, but it did not pass them. There was some fatal mistake in the signals. A short goods' train had run into the one by which Sir Guy and his charge were travelling.

A violent collision occurred almost as Lit ceased speaking. She felt a violent jerk, and then fell forwards on her face. Sir Guy shared the same fate. The two who were speeding to aid Nell Charteris, and warn her of her danger, lay senseless on the floor of the shattered railway carriage.

(To be continued.)

THREE YOUNG MAIDS.

—O—

(Continued from page 81.)

"You said you would teach me."

"So I will, if you wish me to. The day after to-morrow."

"How jolly!"

Mrs. Tresillon did not often indulge in slang now that she was a matron, but the prospect of being taught riding by Rhody was too much for her self-repression; and her husband smiled leniently as he heard the word.

She seemed more the Nan of old that morning, in her short, dainty, white dress, than she had for some time past, and his heart beat quickly and his hopes rose. After all, he might win her to care for him if he tried very hard and amused her. He would do his best; and he cantered away down the avenue, waving his hand as he went with quite youthful glee.

Nan watched him till horse and rider disappeared in the distance, and then went slowly to the drawing-room, and sitting down before the piano let her fingers wander listlessly over the keys.

She was too much alone, and she often felt the time hang heavily on her hands. She couldn't always be pulling the spaniel's ears, or playing on the piano, and the stately satin-gowned house-keeper relieved her of all household troubles, and left her little to do. Tennis she was not very keen on since her marriage, as Rhody did not play it; croquet she abhorred; billiards she was a duffer at; and reading she only cared for occasionally, so she had considerable difficulty in filling the hours with occupation.

That morning she felt particularly *distraine* and languid, and she hailed with delight the advent of Joan about luncheon time.

"Captain Ashton isn't here yet," she said, as she kissed her sister.

"No; do you expect him to-day?"

"He said he was coming this afternoon about five."

"Then I shall not see him."

"Why not?"

"I am going to an afternoon dance at the Rogers, and must leave here at three, in time to get home and dress."

"Joan, you never will!"

"Never will what, Nan?"

"Miss a chance of seeing Arthur Ashton!"

"I shall miss it to-day, for I am determined to go to the Rogers."

"You are very foolish, he might propose to-day."

"I don't think so," she said, a little sadly. "Do you know, Nan, I don't believe he cares a bit about me!"

"Oh, Joan!"

"I don't really. A woman can always tell if a man really loves her."

"And—do you—mind?" faltered Nan, overwhelmed at this crumbling to pieces of her castle in the air.

"No-o, not much, not as much as I should a month ago."

Now a month before, a certain good-looking navy lieutenant had appeared in Bralthwaite and had paid Joan marked attention.

"See, Geoffrey Colbourne!"

"Yes," nodded Joan, reddening visibly, for though extremely romantic, she was not a girl of very deep feeling, and had already transferred her affection from the army to the navy, and was interested in the sailor whose eyes were as blue as her own.

"I wonder how Arthur Ashton will take it when he learns you don't care for him?" said Nan, reflectively, when her sister was dressing to return to Bralthwaite.

"Very lightly, I think," laughed Joan. "Love is a comedy now-a-days, not a tragedy."

"Not always," replied Nan, with a short, quick sigh.

"It will be a comedy to him, mark my words for it, dear," and then she got into the carriage Nan had ordered round for her to be driven back comfortably to Bralthwaite, and made her adieus.

An hour after her departure Captain Ashton arrived, smiling, handsome, self-possessed as usual.

"Been playing?" he asked, after the first greetings were over.

"Yes."

"Any new songs?"

"No."

"Will you sing me some of the old ones then?"

"Not to-day," she replied, listlessly.

"What is the matter with you to-day?" he asked tenderly.

"Nothing, that is the best," she replied, evasively.

How could she tell him the woman he thinks he cares for has found a new lover?

"Will you sing for me?" she went on quickly, to avoid being questioned.

"Of course. I will do anything you wish me," he said, at once seating himself at the piano, and running his hands lightly over the keys, began singing in a rich, deep voice, full of pathos and meaning:

"A place in thy memory, dearest,
Is all that I claim!
To pause, and look back when thou hastest
The sound of my name.
Another may woo thee nearer,
Another may win and wear;
I care not though he be dearer
If I am remembered there."

"Could I be thy true love, dearest,
Couldst thou smile upon me,
I could be the fondest and nearest
That ever loved thee!
But a cloud on my pathway is glooming,
That never must burst upon thee;
And Heaven that made thine all blooming,
Never made thee to wither on mine!"

And on to the end of the beautiful song.
Heaven only knows what evil and daring

thoughts were in the young man's mind as he sang, but he certainly addressed the words to his listener, who stood beside him, looking more beautiful than ever in a dress of shadowy palest blue, with white roses at her breast and belt, her sapphire eyes full of a wistful tenderness for her husband who would be with her again soon.

"Nan, did you like the words?" he whispered, softly.

"Yes; they are very pretty!" she replied, absently.

"Pretty! I think they are charming! I wonder, if I were to go away, whether you would give me a place in your memory!" he said, his dark, passionate eyes fixed on the fair, innocent face.

"Of course! I always remember my friends!"

"And am I nothing but a friend?" he asked, hotly.

"What else should you be?" she queried, wonderingly.

"Your lover!" he replied, bending towards her.

"Lover!" she repeated in amazement.

"Yes! Oh, Nan!" throwing himself at her feet, and clasping her hands in his, "you know I love you! Listen to me! Let me plead with you!"

And then followed words that were a disgrace to his manhood, and made her tingle and blush with shame as they poured from his lips hot as molten lava.

"Let me go! let me go!" she cried, struggling to free herself. "How dare you! How dare you!"

"Because I love you!" he replied, quickly, "and know that you love me! Come away! Leave that old man, who has no right to you! Come with me to Italy! In some sunny nook we will make our home! The world forgetting, by the world forgot!"

"Hush! hush!" she moaned, her head drooping on her breast.

"Why should I hush?" he asked, fiercely.

"Because—you—insult—me!" she faltered, faintly.

"Insult you!" he echoed, a fear, rising in his breast that he had made a deadly mistake. "Insult you! Have you not led me to suppose you wished me to suggest flight to you for months past?"

"I!" she gasped in astonishment.

"Yes, you! Have you not encouraged me by every means in your power! Have you not asked me here time after time, procured me invitations for houses where you were going, driven me out in your phaeton, consulted me on several matters most women"—with biting sarcasm—"consult their husbands on? Why did you do this if you do not love me?"

"I—I did it for Joan's sake!" she faltered, miserably.

"Joan's sake!" he echoed, rising from the ground, and releasing her hands. "I don't understand!"

"I thought you—you cared for her, and meant to make her your wife."

"Good heavens, no! It was you! always you I loved!"

"Captain Ashton, please will you go!" she asked, her face very white, her lips trembling.

"Supposing I say no!" he retorted, "that I won't go with you! What then?"

For a moment the girl stood looking at him with wild eyes dilated with fear; then the ring of a horse's hoofs were heard, and the sound of a cheery voice in the hall, and with a gasping cry she sprang across the room, tore open the door, just as Captain Ashton disappeared through the window, thinking discretion the better part of valour, and precipitated herself into her astonished husband's arms.

"My dear Nan, what is the matter?" he asked, soothingly, drawing her into the room and shutting the door. "Tell me!"

But it was long before her violent sobs ceased, and she was able to tell him the history of his friend's disgraceful treachery.

"And—and you don't care for him, Nan?"

he whispered, scanning her fair face with his eager, yearning eyes.

"Care for him! I hate, loathe, detest him!" she cried, vehemently. "Rhoderick," she went on a minute later, slipping one white arm round his neck, and laying her soft, peach-like cheek against his sun-browned one, "I told you once I did not know what love meant!"

"Yes, darling!"

"I do now! for I love you, my dear, dear husband!" and the soft lips sought his in a passionate kiss.

"Thank Heaven!" he murmured, gratefully, holding her close to his heart, and knowing that at last he had really won his wife.

[THE END.]

BUT NOT OUR HEARTS.

—101—

CHAPTER XXIV.—(continued.)

"Ah! you've come at last!" cried her ladyship, rising to welcome them.

"At last! Are we late?" said Opal, languidly, bowing her recognition to those she knew.

"Not late for anything in particular; only I expected you this morning. I want to talk seriously to your husband."

"You will have the opportunity now."

"Yes, I shall carry him off at once," and, omitting the action to the word, she conducted him out to one of the arbours, and sat chatting away vigorously.

"Come here. There is a seat," said Ruby, brushing aside her sweeping skirts and paying no heed to Lord Mount Severn's objections to their *tête-à-tête*, which no doubt he enjoyed more than she did, being interrupted. "Well, how are you?"

"Very well, and you? But I need not ask. You look blooming!"

"Doesn't she! Like a wed rose," remarked the Earl, facetiously.

"Quite so. Time has only improved you."

"These last few months have been so different," returned Miss Vane, looking gratefully at the woman who had sacrificed herself for them.

"I am glad of that," said Opal, earnestly, and she was glad to think that there was no longer any necessity for Ruby to pinch, and starve, and contrive; that the boys were being well brought up, and that her father, cruel though he had been to her, would never know want.

The Rest was a different place. It had been done up within and without, furnished with taste, the garden filled with choice plants and flowers, and a cook-housekeeper installed, to superintend Jenny's work, and take all trouble off Ruby's hands.

The result was surprising. The girl had grown younger and handsomer; the hard look had left her face, the weariness her eyes. She was better and happier in many respects, but still adhered to her determination to wed a rich man.

After a taste of luxury she felt she could not go back to poverty, to the dull, hard reality that went of money engenders, so she crushed down her love for Jack Radham as she would a noxious serpent, rooted it out and cast it from her, and determined, if she got the chance, to marry Augustus Trevlyn, Earl Mount Severn, a man she certainly despised, and might hate, for he had not one single attribute which would gain respect, and who from his effeminacy deserved the title of "Augusta" the ladylike, which Blackie, who detested him, and his foppish ways, and ridiculous affectations cordially, had given him.

Ruby shut her eyes resolutely to his weaknesses, and thought only of the spikes and balls of his coronet, his long rent-roll, and splendid estates.

"Miss Vane's been very gay," he told Opal, leering at the lady of his love with his gooseberry eyes. "Heaps of dances. I nevaw dance,

and I think she's been cruel to wash wound with othaw fellahs, and leave me disconsolate. Aw!"

"I won't do it again," said Ruby, with a soft, little smile at him; and her sister, seeing the smile, felt a sudden pain at her heart to think that so much grace and youthful freshness should be bartered for gold and a coronet.

"Pwomise."

"I promise," she answered, solemnly, choking back the laugh that rose to her lips at his comical appearance. Sentiment doesn't sit well on a man whose hair is red and whose face is freckled.

"You'll keep it?"

"Certainly I will. Need you ask?"

"Othaw fellahs will bothaw you."

"Not when you are near."

"But I shan't always be near," he objected. "You won't let me be."

"I will, if you ask me nicely," she whispered.

"No, aw, weally though! Do you mean that?"

"I do," she replied, and there is no knowing what the Earl might not have said despite the fact that the room was full of people, only Lady Dorothy, who had finished her conference in the arbour, and returned to her guests, asked her to sing. She rose at once, and going over to the piano, commenced,—

"It was not in the winter."

Our loving lot was cast."

At the first words of the well-remembered song the whole scene vanished from before Opal's eyes, as though the wave of an enchanter's wand had caused it to disappear. Once more she was sitting in the "den" at the Rest, once more the rays of the declining sun were lingering redly on the tree-tops, and streaming in through the curtainless window, falling on Paul's head as he sat beside her, and gleaming in his blue eyes.

Once more he held her fingers in his warm clasp, and whispered tenderly in her ear, while his strong arm surrounded her waist, and her head leaned against his shoulder.

She saw Billie with his head in a box, and heard Bobbie consulting him about his gold fish, listened to Ruby's light badinage, and then—then she felt a touch on the arm, and her happy vision faded away, and stern reality in the shape of Mr. Spragg took its place, and rising with a heavy sigh she followed the others, and went to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER XXV.

MRS. SPRAGG was the first down. When she entered the drawing-room it was quite deserted. She did not take much interest in her toilet, and spent little time over it. She stood looking out at the distant mountains, playing idly with a lily, when a sound like a suppressed groan, made her turn with a start, and she found herself face to face with Ivora Rowand.

It gave her a shock to meet him thus suddenly. She had no idea that he was expected at Westcourt, and his aspect was not reassuring. He looked careworn and reckless, and in his eyes glowed a sombre, almost vengeful light.

The truth was, the Highlander felt bitterly aggrieved. Whilst wandering aimlessly about America he heard of the wreck of the *Junco*—saw the account of it in a newspaper, nearly eighteen months old, that he lighted upon by accident. He had learnt from Lady Dorothy all particulars about Opal's lover, and knew, when he saw the name that headed the list, that his rival was removed.

Without losing much time he left the States and came straight to London, full of hope and joy. But an interview with Lady Dorothy dashed the one and extinguished the other for ever.

The woman he had travelled half across the world to woo was already married, lost to him for ever—married, too, he could not doubt, for money, as no woman could possibly wish to wed a man with a face like a mummy out of love.

He was disgusted, wounded, wretched. He

did not know where to turn for consolation. The Pascars were abroad, he did not know what place; he couldn't go to his old love to have balm poured into his wounds, so he idled about the club, playing recklessly and drinking more than was good for him; and when the invitation came from Lady Dorothy he accepted it eagerly, not thinking that he would meet at Westcourt both the women he had loved.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said, advancing quickly and offering his hand.

"It is, indeed!" replied Opal, faintly.

"I hardly thought we should meet again."

"No," she murmured.

"No. Neither did I think to find in Mrs. Spragg, the rich American's wife, the girl I had known as Opal Vane."

His tones were cruel, and as he spoke her cheeks paled, while he, never taking his eyes off her, drank in all the wonderful loveliness of her face.

"I think, if I remember rightly, that you told me your affections were given into one man's keeping for ever, irrevocably, unchangeably!" he continued.

"And if I did!" she said, proudly, lifting her fair head with a haughty movement.

"Oh, nothing much. Only I did not think that man was Mr. Spragg."

"Neither was it."

"I see. His dollars won the day—made you faithless to the memory of your girlhood's lover."

"Sir Ivors, you forget yourself," and with a gesture of disdain she swept away from him, her white satin gown sweeping out in shimmering folds behind her.

"Forgive me!" he cried, impetuously, springing after her, and seizing the little bare hand that hung at her side, "my love for you drives me wild, makes me almost mad. Have you no pity, no compassion for the man whose life you have robbed of joy and content!"

"Let go my hand. How dare you forget the respect that is due to me!"

"I will not," he returned, clenching his teeth and tightening his clasp. "You shall listen to me," but as he spoke the door opened and the Duchess José entered.

"Am I interrupting a *tête-à-tête* !" she asked, snarling, darting a lightning glance at the two occupants of the room. "Shall I go! Am I *de trop*!" and she made a movement as though about to retire.

"By no means," said Sir Ivor, dropping Opal's hand, and going towards the Spaniard. "You never could be that to me."

"Indeed! You are flustering. I remember, though, you and Mrs. Spragg"—how she lingered over the suromantic name, and how hateful it sounded on her lips—"were excellent friends before she married. I thought, perhaps, you were renewing that friendship with vows, and protestations of undying affection for each other."

"Then you were mistaken, madame," said Opal, with icy haughtiness. "I am not one of those misguided women who think it necessary to have a lover as well as a husband."

The shot told. The Duchess flushed hotly, the crimson wave spreading to the roots of her hair, and tingling even her neck. She had not bargained for this woman she hated knowing so much about her. She recovered herself instantly, and retorted,—

"It is fortunate for you that you are cold, as if you were not your extraordinary husband might not prove sufficiently attractive for you, and you would like a little change sometimes."

To this Opal vouchsafed no reply. With the air of a finished *grande dame* she walked to the door intending to leave the room, but the entrance of her sister, Mrs. Davidson, and several others, saved her that trouble, and she returned to her old place by the window.

That night there were two men who bore sore hearts in their bosoms. One was Ivors Rowand, and the other Jack Raham. The former was reckless and desperate, and in his fierce pain of disappointment he said things to the woman at his side that bound him to her afresh, forged

again the fetters that for awhile he had had the manliness and honour to cast aside.

But the Duchess José was a clever woman, and she loved the Highlander as well as such women as she can love, so she soothed and flattered and coaxed him, and he went back to that bondage which was a shame and dishonour to him.

The latter was sad with the grief of misplaced confidence and affection. His big brown eyes were full of unutterable sorrow as he watched Raby flirting with the Earl.

She was looking her best in a closely fitting gown, the colour of a *glorie de Dijon* rose, with scarlet blossoms at her breast, and in her dusky hair, which vied with the damask bloom of her cheek, on which rested like a shadow the thick lashes as she cast down her lids, and listened to "Augusta's" ladylike and rapid talk.

The Earl meant business, and the other man, standing like the Peri, disconsolate, outside the paradise he could not gain, saw that he did, and choked back the unocular oath that rose to his lips as he saw the sallow, freckled face get nearer and nearer to that richly-tinted, lovely one.

They sat late at dinner; but when it was over Raby's titled swain proposed a stroll in the garden, to which she readily agreed; and as they paced up and down the terrace walk, enjoying the beauty of the calm summer's night and the sweet perfume of the dew-drenched flowers, he proposed, and, being accepted, took his first kiss from the fresh lips that were henceforth to be his own private property.

The next day the engagement was publicly announced, and the bride elect received many congratulations from the men and many Judas embraces from the women, who felt that they could strangle her as they put their arms round her throat, especially Miss Revolt, who looked upon Mount Severn and all his goods and chattels as belonging to her, and was ready to die with envy.

"Well, I suppose you're content?" said Lady Dorothy to Vane, who had come over to add his felicitations to the others, and pay homage to the future countess.

"Yes, I think so," he answered, slowly.

"I don't believe you are. You think she ought to be a duchess at least."

"I think she would grace that elevated position."

"Doubtless. Still I think she is doing very well, considering all things."

"Of course, of course," he agreed, hurriedly. "I hardly hoped she would win such a prize."

"I wonder at that. She is your daughter."

"You flatter me." She smiled suavely; "nevertheless, with an extremely disagreeable expression in his eyes."

"Indeed. I don't quite mean to do that."

"You needn't tell me so, I know it."

"That is satisfactory. I say, Cope, what a time you'll have now, eh! Both daughters off your hands. There'll be no holding you, you'll be so wild," and she actually gave him a poke in the ribs with her stick, which made him wince and swear simultaneously, and sent him off with a muttered excuse to the more congenial society of the fair dames who thronged the octagon room.

The beauties in their Watteau tea-gowns, with languishing eyes and ruby lips, were certainly more to the taste of this Sybarite than Lady Dorothy, with her keen orbs that saw so much, her yellow skin, and her sharp tongue. She rubbed him the wrong way; they stroked and soothed him, and petted him to his heart's content. One drew an easy chair near the open window, another brought him tea, a third cream, and a fourth biscuits; while Lady Scargill exhibited her three-year-old son to him, and declared he should help Billie to hold up Raby's train at the wedding.

"That mite!" exclaimed Mrs. Davidson, derisively. "Why, he can hardly stand by himself, and would be sure to stumble and do some damage."

"Oh, no, he wouldn't!" contradicted his mother at once. "He is wonderfully steady on his feet, though he is so small."

"He does look rather young for such an office," remarked Vane, regarding him with well simulated interest.

"Doesn't he!" cried the widow, eagerly, glad of any opportunity that would give her a chance of agreeing with and getting into the favour of the man whose dark eyes had made such a deep impression on her mature heart, ever since that day when she had first seen him at Mr. Spragg's fête, leaning against the oak. "He is little more than a baby, and wouldn't know what to do."

"He would do exactly what Billie does, and I am sure he would look lovely in crimson plush and point-lace," and Lady Scargill caught up the child and kissed him fondly, while Sir Humphrey looked on smilingly, and registered a mental vow to keep straight for the future, for the sake of wife and son, and touch neither cards nor dice, nor lay long odds on the favourite.

"I am sure of that," said Cope, suavely, never missing an opportunity of paying a compliment when he could. "He is as beautiful as the cherubs Guido painted."

This was not strictly true, for baby Scargill's nose turned heavenward, and his mouth was wide; but what of that! His parents were delighted, and voted Mr. Vane "a delightful man."

"Of course it would add to the picturesque effect at the altar," said Mrs. Davidson, seeing things were against her; "and it is so fashionable now to have pages in attendance on the bride."

"Most fashionable. I must go and consult Raby about it," and her ladyship carried off her son and her husband.

"Wonderful how fond some people are of children," said Vane, reflectively.

"Wonderful!" agreed the fair American.

"I can't understand infant worship," he continued.

"No!" she said, inquiringly, wishing to feel her way to his sentiments. "You don't approve of that?"

"Certainly not."

"Neither do I. Like me, I suppose, you do not care for them much?"

"Between ourselves," he said, lowering his voice and speaking confidentially, for the widow's melting eyes were ready to burn over with sympathy; "I do not care for them at all. They are a trial to anyone whose nerves are not very strong."

"I quite agree with you. 'Tria!' is the only word that explains what they are."

"Yes. What I have suffered with my boys!" and he lifted his hands and shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah! I feel for you," she murmured, tenderly.

"They are bears, madame, perfect bears. They have worried and tormented me nearly into my grave. I was a robust man, now I am far from strong; and it is due entirely to the annoyance and anxiety my family have caused me."

"Indeed! What a misfortune you cannot get rid of them."

"It is better now," he said, with a despair of self-commiseration. "My youngest, as you know, lives at Temple Dene, the other three boys are at a boarding-school."

"How pleasant for you?"

"Yes, in the present, but the future has to be considered. They will, I fear, be a great expense and trouble to me in the way of choosing professions. It is easy for a rich man to place his sons well in the world, difficult for a poor out; and you are aware, madame, I believe, that my income is not what it used to be—not what I could wish it."

"I have heard that," she assented, "and I know well how hard it is to face poverty after having lived in affluence."

"It is, indeed," with another sigh.

"My case is similar to yours," she went on. "In Jonathan's lifetime we simply rolled in wealth, yet at his death I found I had only a few hundreds a year. Matters were mismanaged, I think; I ought to have had more."

"Doubtless," agreed her companion.

"In fact, I know I ought, and now if I had anyone to help me I might make good my claim to a silver mine that I am perfectly certain belonged to him, and receive from its yieldings a princely income."

"If I can be of any service, my dear madame, pray command me," said Vane, with alacrity, a new light glowing in his eyes as they dwelt on the widow's full-blown charms.

"You are very kind," she simpered.

"Not at all. Time hangs heavy on my hands now, it will be more so after my daughter's marriage. I shall be only too glad of some occupation. Pray accept my services, if you wish for them."

"I do, most earnestly; and since you are so kind I will do so."

"And when will you give me particulars?" he asked, feeling that he couldn't too soon get at the rights of the case with regard to the silver mine.

"When I can. We could hardly consult at Westcourt."

"Certainly not. But will you honour The Rest with your presence some day this week? If you have the papers with you we can look over them then."

"I shall be delighted to come to your house."

"Very well, then. I will ask Mrs. Spragg to come over and receive you."

"Thanks."

"I must ask her now," and he went over to the lounge where Opal was sitting, with Billie playing at her feet with the last new toy his brother-in-law had given him, an alligator that wriggled its body and tail in a wonderful way. "I want you to do me a favour," he said, bending down.

"What is it?" she asked, coldly, without looking up.

She never did look at him; father and daughter mutually avoided one another. She had never forgiven him for expelling her lover's worthlessness, or for forcing her into the arms of the man she loathed and dreaded, driving her into a bondage that was worse than death, and he stood slightly in awe of this haughty, self-possessed woman, who was *grande dame* to the tips of her slender fingers, and utterly unlike the gentle, amiable girl who had dreamt her love-dream under the old thatched roof of the Old Rest.

It was only his selfishness that drove him to her side, his desire to make his future perfectly safe and smooth.

He knew it was no use asking Ruby to return home even for one day. She was too much occupied with the Earl, and her trousseau, and approaching marriage. She would flatly refuse his request.

Opal might consent to it, because the boys were coming home from school for their holidays, and as she had not seen them for some time, that, he reasoned, might be an inducement to her to go.

"Mrs. Davidson wishes to consult me on a little matter of business, and as there is no room here, free from the intrusion of these gay butterflies," waving hands towards the fair ones in the Watteau tea-gowns, "I have asked her to come over to The Rest. Can you play the part of hostess for me next Thursday? The boys come home that day, and will be very glad to see you and their brother."

"Blackie coming home!" cried Billie, leaving the alligator to wriggle alone on the floor. "Oh, I should like to see him."

Mrs. Spragg looked at the eager face and shining eyes, and then said, quietly,—

"I will come."

"A thousand thanks!" said her father, effusively.

"Thank Billie, not me," she said, with chilling reserve. "I go for the sake of the child."

"So that you come I don't care what you come for," muttered Vane, as he returned to Mrs. Davidson.

"It is all settled," he said, aloud. "My daughter will come over with you. So I shall expect you, with all documents, on Thursday."

"I will not fail to come."

And then he made his adieu, and went to

leave the room; but Tina Bevolz, who was getting rather desperate, seeing all the men taking unto themselves wives, leaving her on the parent stalk, and thinking Vane must be worth looking up, since the knowing widow paid him such marked attention, stopped, and, with a sweet smile, accosted him in dulcet tones.

"Let me congratulate you too. Your dear daughter! I was so delighted to hear the news. Such an excellent match!"

"Thanks, yes. I am quite content."

"Yes. Still it is not more than she deserves."

"You are extremely kind."

"Not at all! She will grace the high position to which Lord Mount Severn will raise her."

"I hope so," replied the countess elect's father with becoming modesty.

"I am sure of it! She is so graceful and handsome."

"You overwhelm me in praising my little girl to this extent."

"You must acknowledge her beauty is unique. Do you know, I never saw such a remarkable likeness between father and child as that which exists between you and Miss Vane."

Tina laid her hand on his arm as she spoke, and smiled lovingly into his eyes, thinking it would be better to be mistress of The Rest—though she had called it "a tumble-down hovel" once—than have no house at all, and she had heard in some mysterious way that Mr. Spragg had given his father-in-law a sum that would make him independent for his life; and decidedly he was handsome.

"Really! You are too kind!" and then Vane, knowing that Mrs. Davidson was watching them, and that women when they are on the shady side of forty are apt to be jealous of younger and fresher beauties, made his escape, and, with many murmured compliments and pretty speeches, left Westcourt.

If the silver mine should turn out to be the widow's property, why, of course, it would not do to offend her and lose such a chance, especially for the sake of a saucer-eyed and forward girl, for whom he did not care a single straw.

CHAPTER XXVI.

VANE went home in a highly-contented frame of mind, at peace with himself and all the world. He was doing well, getting on swimmingly, and if this new venture turned up trumps, why, there was no knowing what might happen.

After all, The Rest was a little dull. Towards evening, at dinner, and after, he began to crave for someone to talk to, and why shouldn't that someone be a wife? There was no reason whatever why the companion of his solitude should not bear that relationship to him, always providing that her pockets were well and heavily lined. That must be a *sine qua non*.

As he had said to Lady Dorothy, at his time of life a man looked for something beyond mere good looks—looked for something more substantial and lasting. And a silver mine—well, that was substantial, and Mrs. Davidson was anything but a plain woman, and then she was chatty, and agreeable, and amusing, so it wouldn't be a bad investment altogether.

He longed for wealth—great wealth—that would enable him to fling money about freely; to travel, to yacht, and keep some good hunters, and racers, and open house; play the great man, and receive homage and adulation.

He knew he wouldn't personally benefit much by Ruby's grand marriage. Being father-in-law to an Earl would be a feather in his cap, but there the advantage would end. It was not likely his second daughter, once married, would trouble her head about his wants or necessities; she was not that sort of woman, and Mount Severn's semi-idiotcy saved him from the raids of his rapacious relative-elect. He either did not, or stolidly would not, understand hints and innuendos.

As to Mr. Spragg, Vane knew well—though

not a word on the subject had passed between the two men—that his marriage was a failure, an utter failure, and that beyond the four hundred a year, and an occasional dinner, he would not get much out of him, and the dinners even would be very occasional, for the mistress of Temple Dame, he was aware, was not anxious to see him often; and her husband, his eyes rendered very keen by his love for her, was not likely to invite anyone to the house whom he thought was in the least degree objectionable to her.

Under these circumstances, matrimony was his best card, and he intended to play it, and win the game of wealth and ease. So he exerted himself to a wonderful degree, and nearly drove Jenny and the housekeeper mad, giving directions and orders, and then countermanding them and giving others in his desperate endeavours to have all things *comme il faut* for the reception of the fair widow.

He managed to make the rooms look well, with heaps of roses and gay blossoms, and the luncheon, spread in what had originally been the drawing-room, was quite dainty and tasty.

Bob, Bart, and Blackie he packed off to the den, with strict orders not to appear till they were sent for, and then stood waiting the arrival of his guests. They came ere long—Mrs. Davidson, Opal, Billie, and, to his intense astonishment, Ruby and her intended.

"Thought I'd come over with the others, and say good-bye to the old place," she said, nonchalantly. "I daren't I shall not have time to pay another visit."

"Very glad to see you, my dear," returned her father, graciously, kissing her for the Earl's edification, and offering the same courtesy to his other daughter; but she drew back with an unmistakable gesture of repugnance; and Vane, feeling somewhat disconcerted, turned to the widow, and made her some very civil speeches, at which she actually blushed.

"What a picturesque place!" she cried, determined to be pleased with everything.

"I am glad you like it."

"I more than like it. It is charming. So rural, so peaceful-looking."

"Quite rustic," struck in Mount Severn, wishing to distinguish himself; "all woses and honeysuckle."

"Just the spot for a sylvan idyl, isn't it, Mrs. Spragg?"

Mrs. Davidson looked at her host as she spoke, so she did not see the spasm of pain [that contracted Opal's features, nor the mist that dimmed her brilliant eyes.

"Just so," she acquiesced, quietly.

"Where are the boys, dad?" asked Ruby.

"I have sent them to the schoolroom (he never called it the 'den') to be out of the way."

"Are they not to lunch with us?"

"No, they might be troublesome."

"I don't think they will be that, and I wish them to lunch with us."

Opal for once looked her father full in the face, and his eyes sank beneath the contemptuous scorn of hers.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Vane, I want to see your boys," chimed in his charmer.

"Since you wish it, then," and he beckoned to the lads, who stood with their noses flattened against the window of the den.

In an instant it was thrown up, and they raced across to Opal, hanging on to her and Billie, and kissing them vigorously until sharply called to order by their father, when they remembered their good manners, and greeted the strangers.

They were delighted to hear they were to lunch with the others, and whispered so to their sister, as they seated themselves as near to her as they could—Blackie on her right, Bertie on her left; then Billie, then Bobbie, who wished to grumble, but didn't dare to do so, because he was not at her side, and who presently consoled himself by interchanging confidences with the twin-brother he had not seen for many months.

"Handsome youths," whispered Mrs. Davidson, approvingly.

"Do you think so?" muttered her host, in the same key, as he helped her to lobster salad.

"Yes. Your children are remarkable for

their great good looks. "I am not surprised at that though," she added, a minute later, "considering who their father is," and she favoured him with an admiring glance.

"You are flattering me," he smiled, well-pleased at her florid compliments.

"I could not flatter you."

"I hope you never will, that you will always be candid and open with me."

"You need not fear I always shall be," she assured him, with an amorous sigh.

She was thinking of love and sentiment, he of the silver mine.

Ruby was much amused at this bye-play, and she watched the matured lovers through her long lashes, as she toyed with the chicken on her plate, and made monosyllabic replies to the Earl's remarks, wondering what scheme her amiable parent had in his head with regard to the full-blown widow, whose many debts and impeccability were common talk, and known to all her friends and acquaintances, who marvelled how she got the handsome dresses she wore, the costly lace, and threw a doubt on the genuineness of the splendid diamonds with which she decked her fair throat and arms at balls and soirées, saying that had they been real stones her hungry creditors would never have left her in undisturbed possession of them.

There was a good deal of truth in this, and as Miss Vane remembered about them she felt more and more puzzled to understand her father's tactics.

Opal, on the other hand, took not the slightest notice of what was going on. She was fully occupied with the boys. Her sad eyes rested on them lovingly, and she felt glad they were so happy, and looked so well. She forgot her heavy sorrow for a while, in the pleasure of the hour; and later on, when she and they retired to the den for a confidential chat, for a while she brightened into something of her former self.

"I say, sis," said Bob, leaning affectionately on her shoulder, "you're no end of a swell now!"

"Am I?"

"Yes. What a fine gown!" touching the lace and muslin gently.

"This is a very simple one," she smiled.

"Yes," piped Billie; "you should see her when she goes to a ball. She is fine."

"What does she wear, young 'un?" questioned Bert.

"Silk, and satin, and gold, and velvet, and pearls," returned the child, looking up with widely-open eyes.

"Not altogether chick," she expostulated, ruffling the soft, golden curls from his brow.

"You would be smart if you wore them all at once."

"She wears satin, and velvet, and pearls all at once," declared the little fellow, stoutly.

"You're fibbing," said Bobbie.

"No," interposed Mrs. Spragg, "he is telling the truth."

"My! You must be fine then!"

"Well, I suppose I am when I have got it on. It is a black velvet dress, with a white satin petticoat embroidered with pearls."

"How grand!"

"It is well to be you," laughed Bert, carelessly.

"Ah!" she said, drawing a quick breath. "Is that what you think?"

"Of course," he answered. "You have everything you can possibly desire, haven't you?"

"Yes," she assented, adding to herself, "as far as luxuries and fine clothes go."

"And then Spragg's a decent sort of fellow, not like that idiot out there," and he nodded towards the garden, where Ruby sat in an easy chair, under the spreading leaves of a chestnut, while the Earl lay stretched at her feet, sucking the top of his cane, and staring at nothing.

"His lack of brains won't matter," put in Blackie. "Our beloved alster has enough for both."

"True," agreed the other. "Still, if I were a girl I'd marry a man, not a hybrid sort of creature, or remain single all the days of my life."

"No, you wouldn't, Bert," said Opal, bitterly.

"If you were a girl you'd do as most of us do, sell yourself for a title, or money, or a home."

"Not I. I'd rather work the fingers off my hands than be wife to a thing like that," and he waved his hands towards the reclining nobleman.

"Women can't work."

"Pooh! What are you talking about. The emancipated female of the present day can do anything, from sawing your leg off down to keeping accounts in a butcher's shop."

"We are not all emancipated and useful females," she said with a sigh, thinking of her own helplessness.

"No, thank goodness. I hope when I go to look for a spouse that she won't be able to do anything save look pretty."

"Not a useful helpmate. You will want to be a rich man in order to have the power to gratify this whim."

"I shall be," he announced, confidently.

"And tell me," she continued, with sudden interest, "what are you going to be?"

"A lawyer. Mr. Spragg says I may be one if I like."

"Ah! And you, Blackie?"

"A soldier," he returned, promptly, squaring his shoulders, and drawing himself up. "There are only two professions that I think fit for a gentleman, the navy or army, and I shall choose the latter."

"Have you asked permission?" queried Bert.

"Not as yet. But I am sure Mr. Spragg won't refuse, and if he does, Opal must make him give his consent."

She turned her head away at that.

"Washy says I am to be a country gentleman," cried Billie.

"And who may 'Washy' be?" inquired Bob.

"Mr. Spragg."

"Well, young 'un, you're rather cool, aren't you?"

"No. He told me to call him that."

"Oh! I see."

"And he says he will always give me plenty of money, so that I need never work."

"You're in luck."

"Ain't I?" he queried, gravely, and then dashed out of the window after a butterfly, closely followed by Bert and Bobbie.

"I hope he won't tire himself," said Opal, anxiously, watching him, as he raced about with the others.

"He'll be all right," said Blackie, soothingly. "He looks ever so much better."

"Do you really think so?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes, really."

"Still, he is far from strong, and if he overheats himself, and then gets chilled, the consequences may be serious."

"Shall I call him in?"

"No," she answered, hesitatingly. "Let him remain out. He seems to be enjoying himself so much."

"That he is, as I never thought he would a year ago, and that he owes to you; and we, too, owe you a debt of gratitude for all you have done for us. The future smiles now for us, before she frowned blackly."

And, Blackie, who had more heart and feeling than the others, put his arm round her waist and kissed her tenderly.

As she felt that caress, and saw his happy face, she felt more content and resigned than she had since her wedding-day.

"I only hope you are happy," he went on.

"You deserve to be, for all you have done for us."

"Ah! we needn't talk about that," she said, forcing a smile to her lips. "It satisfies me to know that you are all well off;" and then, fearing to prolong the conversation, which had taken an awkward turn, she went out, and joined Ruby and her lover; and Mr. Vane appearing soon after with Mrs. Davidson, from the retirement of the library—where they had spent the afternoon poring over papers and legal-looking documents—they refreshed themselves with food and coffee, and, bidding adieu to the inmates of The Rect, drove back to Westcourt.

(To be continued.)

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No clergyman of the Church of England may engage in trade unless it shall be on behalf of any number of partners exceeding six, or where the business devolves upon him by a will.

BATHING in Caracas is generally done in the open air—that is, the bathroom in the house is almost an unknown luxury. In the first place, a bathroom indoors would be too close for comfort, and, in the second place, the plumber's art is not practised to any extent. In every court—and almost all the houses in the Venezuelan capital are provided with them—there is the inevitable fountain, whence is derived the water supply of the house. Attached to the fountain is a large and deep bowl, generally about four feet deep and as many broad. Into this the water runs continuously, and by stopping up the escape in the bottom, you may quickly provide a full bowl of clean, sparkling, but not cold water. Into this you plunge, with no other covering than the sky and enjoy yourself to the full, caring nothing for the world or the neighbour who is watching you from the roof of the adjoining house, where he is smoking away the mosquitoes and the other insects of the tropics.

OF monasteries and lamaseries in Pekin the number is endless. The lamas and bonzes who dwell therein can be counted by the thousands. They are mostly Tibetans and Mongolians supposed to be studying Buddhism under the direction of an authenticated lineal descendant of Buddha himself. Indeed, in one particular monastery three lineal descendants are to be seen for a consideration. They are regarded as semi-gods, and treated as such. Of the three so favoured, fed and flattered, one is a youngster of twelve years, a bright, lively Mongolian boy, fully alive to his own importance, high dignity, and destiny, yet not averse to the filling of his baggy little pockets with the dollars of such "foreign devils" as offered him the opportunity of so doing. The lamas and bonzes are a greasy, grimy, dirt-incrusted lot. The denser the dirt the greater the reputation for sanctity and close spiritual affinity with Buddha. Their whole time seems to be passed in eating, extracting dollars from strangers and sleeping.

FAOETLE.

FATHER: "Who made this pudding?" Mother (looking at her daughters in succession): "I—I promised not to tell."

TOM: "What did you learn at the students' art school in Munich?" George: "To draw." "Still life!" "No, beer."

WIFE: "I'll be ready in just one second, dear!" Husband: "Then I'll have time to run and get shaved before we start, love."

BARBER: "Shall I go over your face twice?" Customer: "No, I think once will do; I don't want you to strain your voice."

MA: "Tommy, you seem to love papa better than you do me." Tommy: "Oh, ma, I don't mean to; but, you see, pa allows has his pockets full o' pennies."

JUDGE (to prisoner): "You have smashed several of this man's ribs." Scorer (sulkily): "Serves him right. I broke the rims of my wheel riding over him."

"That woman tried to beat me down on the price of quinine." "What did she say?" "She said I ought to make it cheaper because she had to pay her little boy to take it!"

JUDGE: "How old are you?" Fair Witness: "Well—er—I'm—er— Judge: "Better hurry, madam. Every minute's delay makes it worse."

SHE: "There is one serious obstacle before us." He: "Your parents?" She: "No; but my little brother is unalterably opposed to our attachment."

MRS. SUBURB: "I threw a stone at a hen, and hit it, too." Mr. Suburb: "With the stone?" Mrs. Suburb: "No; but my ring flew off and hit it right square."

"I NEVER have nightmare now," said GAZEM. "You ought to be glad," replied Tenspot. "No, I don't have nightmares. I have horseless dreams."

DR. CUREM: "I see you have ordered quite a number of your patients to the country. They needed change, I presume." Dr. Bigfee: "Awfully. Hadn't a penny left."

"MAMMA," said the bride of two months, "I'm really afraid John doesn't love me. Instead of quarrelling like we used to before we were married, he laughs at me."

MOTHER: "Goodness! How did you hurt your finger so?" Little Son: "With a hammer." "When?" "A good while ago." "I didn't hear you cry." "No, mother. I thought you were out."

"The time is coming," shouted the orator, "when the working man shall have his rights. Will you join me, friend?" "No," said the man addressed. "I'm expectin' to be an employer myself before a year is over."

MR. SPOONRY (to his fiancée's little brother): "How is your sister getting on with her singing?" Tommy: "Oh, I can't tell very well myself, but I notice pa has taken the wool out of his ears for the first time, to-day!"

"Your Johnny is such an active, irrepressible boy." "Yes. I think that is because he is so healthy." "He is never ill?" "Never had a day of illness in his life. I suppose that's because he is so active and irrepressible."

"WHAT is co-education, my son?" "It is a foolish system of education, father, whereby the male students are perpetually condemned to see themselves crowded from first honours by an inferior sex."

MR. BILKINS (a sea-side cottager): "I notice you always go to a private bathing establishment. Why don't you bathe in the ocean?" Mrs. Bilkins: "The ocean! Goodness me! Why, all those hotel boarders bathe in it."

DR. NURSUM: "Couldn't think of it. It wouldn't do for me to take a rest and neglect my patients." Assum: "Why not get a brother physician to attend them in your absence?" Dr. Nursum: "Not much. I did that once, and he cured them all."

TOWNE: "There's one thing I've noticed about Downe; he has a habit of jumping at conclusions. Haven't you noticed it?" Brown: "Well, I've observed that he always wakes with a start just as the minister is finishing his sermon."

WILLIE GOOD: "Pa, our teacher says that 'collect' and 'congregate' mean the same thing." Rev. Good: "Well, you tell your teacher that you have information that there is considerable difference between a congregation and a collection."

RAGGED ROBERT: "Wot yer doin'?" Mouldy Mike: "I'm layin' wld my head in der sun, so's to get meself sunburnt." "Wot's th' game now?" "There's a temperance feedin' place around th' corner, an' th' redder a man's nose is th' more symperthy he gets."

GUEST: "I'd soon starve here." Proprietor (country hotel): "There's plenty to eat." "Perhaps so, but those waiter girls of yours don't attend to me." "They don't! Well, that's easily fixed. Here's some wax." What good is that! "Put in on your monstache, of course, and curl the ends. You've got too much of a married look."

DOCTOR: "Good-morning, Mr. Lover. What can I do for you?" Mr. Lover: "I—I called air, to—to ask for the hand of—of your daughter." "Hamp! Appetite good?" "Not very." "How is your pulse?" "Very rapid when—I am with her; very feeble when away." "Troubled with palpitation?" "Awfully when I think of her." "Take my daughter. You'll soon be cured. One guinea, please."

LADY SHARP: "Her marriage seems to be happier than the majority of that kind." The Hon. Billy: "Yes, and it's all owing to the wisdom of her father. Instead of settling a fortune upon them, he gives his titled son-in-law an allowance that is to come if they ever separate." Lady Sharp: "Oh, I see. Instead of buying a husband for her, he has secured one on a salary."

BUSY CABMAN (closing the door): "Where to air?" Apoplectic Gentleman (gasping): "I—I can't catch my breath. I—I feel as if I were going to die." Busy Cabman: "Yes, sir. Shall I drive to an undertaker's or the hospital, sir?"

RETURNED FIGHTER: "And as I was being carried away in the ammunition waggon I— Listener: "Don't you mean the ambulance waggon?" Returned Fighter: "No, sir; I was so full of bullets they put me in the ammunition waggon."

MR. CUTIMAN: "We are getting perfect butter now. Buy it of a farmer who comes into the city twice a week. I presume you have good butter right along." Mr. Suburb: "First-rate." "Make it yourself!" "No; buy it in the city and carry it home."

At a meeting of a Board of Guardians it was proposed that an honorarium be presented to the clerk. "Gentlemen," remarked the well-meaning member, "our worthy clerk don't want anything of the sort. If we gave him an honorarium he wouldn't have time to play it. A sum of money would be of much more service to him."

A MAN was hunting for a house to move into. He was talking to some parties, when one of them spoke up and asked him if he had paid his rent to his former landlord. "Yes, sir," he said, rather hesitatingly. "Can you get a recommendation?" "Oh, yes; I can get Mr. Smith, my landlord, to give me a recommendation." "How do you know you can?" "Oh, I know I can, 'cause he wants me to get out."

MRS. DEKANTER: "You said you were going to be detained at your office all the evening, but you weren't there. Now, where were you?" Mr. DeKanter: "My dear, there's no excuse in your getting excited. It really—" Mrs. DeKanter: "Why don't you answer my question?" Mr. DeKanter: "My dear, I would answer your question if I was sure you wouldn't question my answer."

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SOCIETY.

THE Duke and Duchess of York will pay a week's visit to Lord Llangloek, at Hendre, Monmouth, arriving on the 29th inst.

CLARENCE HOUSE will continue in the occupation of the Duchess of Coburg until the end of the year, and then it will probably be granted to the Duke and Duchess of Connaught by a Queen's warrant.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales will entertain a large number of guests at Sandringham from Saturday, November 3rd, until Monday the 12th. There will be two sets of "week-end" guests, and a shooting-party from Monday, November 5th, until Saturday the 10th.

PRINCE EDWARD OF YORK has seriously begun his education under the direction of his mother's late governess. He is already somewhat of a French scholar and reads very well, his accomplishment as a reader being keenly appreciated by his younger brother and sister.

THE Queen has given her consent to a proceeding which has caused great delight in the Colonies. The opening of the first session of the first Parliament of the Australian Commonwealth is to be marked by the visit of the Duke and Duchess of York to Australia in the spring of next year.

THE Queen is greatly interested in the approaching visits of the Prince and Princess of Wales to Ireland, and of the Duke and Duchess of York to Australia. It is not at all certain that her Majesty will again visit Ireland next year. The Queen is said to be very anxious to meet the Empress Frederick abroad early next spring, all being well.

THE Russian Imperial nurseries are remarkably simple and unostentatious; and the three little Grand Duchesses are not allowed to wear any jewellery, although it is said that every pin that is used is made of gold, presumably that no harm may come to them through blood-poisoning.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales's visit to Belfast will probably take place early in January. Their Royal Highnesses will be the guests of the Marquis and Marchioness of Londonderry, at Mount Stewart, County Down. They will place the foundation-stone of the new Royal Victoria Hospital during their stay at Mount Stewart. Nothing else with regard to their visit is settled, although several plans are in prospect.

EMPEROR FRANCIS JOSEPH is cutting down the expenses of his household and putting an end to perquisites enjoyed by court servants since the days of Maria Theresa. They had allowances, of wood, wine and venison, with two wax candles in the summer and two in the winter. Their liveries will no longer be their own, and they will not be allowed to sell the cold victuals left from the daily meals and the State banquets.

It is hoped that her Majesty the Empress Frederick may be well enough to be moved to the Riviera before the winter. Should this plan be carried out the Empress will reside for some months at Sir Edward and Lady Esmyntrude Malet's beautiful chateau near Monaco, which they have placed at her disposal; and if the Queen is able to visit the Riviera next spring, her Majesty would meet her eldest daughter in this way, which would save the fatigue of a journey to Germany. The Empress Frederick will in any case have one of her daughters staying with her throughout the winter.

WHEN the Court is in Scotland six messengers are continually employed in going backwards and forwards from London, and during this period couriers may be seen every morning at King's Cross starting for Balmoral, with forty or fifty bags and boxes. They remain at Balmoral about twenty-four hours, and then convey back to town all the documents which have been signed. Thousands of people would like to fill a position of such dignity as that of the Queen of England and Empress of India, but there are very few people who at eighty years of age would care to have to get through the vast amount of labour which devolves on Her Majesty.

STATISTICS.

AUSTRALIA sends us 500 millions pounds of wool a year.

NINETY-SIX THOUSAND FOUR HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-FIVE of Ireland's population are in receipt of poor relief.

THERE are 534,000 horses in Great Britain, and four and a half million cattle.

NINE of the present aldermen of the City of London have been Lord Mayor.

AUSTRALIANS hold a world's record in tea consumption, drinking nearly eight pounds a head yearly.

THE longest recorded hair growing on a female head was 8 ft. The longest recorded beard was 12 ft.

GEMS.

TRUTH is the offspring of unbroken meditations and of thoughts often revised and corrected.

HOMES is a little hollow scooped out of the windy hill of the world, where we can be shielded from its cares and annoyances.

EXAMPLES would, indeed, be excellent things were not people so modest that none will set, and so vain that none will follow them.

WHATEVER touches the nerves of motives, whatever shifts man's moral position, is mightier than steam, or caloric, or lightning.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

TOMATO SOUP.—Ingredients: One carrot, one turnip, one stick of celery, two pounds of fresh tomatoes, a bunch of herbs and parsley, one quart of water, one ounce of small sage or taploes, salt and pepper, a little castor sugar, an ounce of butter. Prepare the vegetables, and cut them in small pieces. Melt the butter in a saucepan, put in the vegetables and fry for a few minutes. Next put in the tomatoes, cut in slices, also the herbs and stock. Boil till the vegetables are quite soft, take out the herbs, then rub the soup through a hair-sieve. Rinse out your pan, pour back the soup, let it boil, then shake in gradually the sage or taploes. It must now boil till the sage becomes clear and floats. Season nicely with salt and pepper, and if too acid, add a little castor sugar. Serve with neat croûtons of bread.

RIZZERED HADDOCK.—You should have a haddock about three-quarters or a pound weight. Sprinkle it over with salt, and let it stand about an hour. Then scrape it clean of scales, take off the head and dry well in a soft cloth. Put it down on a table and split it open. In splitting a herring you cut it along the back into the bone, but a white fish you open it along the belly to the bone. When it is open and quite flat take the bone out; begin at the top and lift the bone off with the aid of a knife. It is easily done. Always begin where the head was. Now dust it over both sides with a little flour, pepper, and salt, and pat it smooth. The flour dries it, but it must only be a little. Now rub the bars of a gridiron with a bit of suet. Make the gridiron hot. It ought to be a double gridiron. Put it on a bright fire and cook the fish for ten minutes—most of the time on the out side, as the skin side is apt to scorch. If your fire is not bright enough on top it will do in front, but cook it most on the out side. Then put a few little bits of butter over it, and use very hot. Rizzered haddocks are very good just scraped clean, salted for a few hours, washed and dried, and hung up to dry for a day or part of a day. In that case they need not be split open, and are more easily handled. Cook them the very same way, and about the same time.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Death's Head moth is the only British moth which can utter any sound.

KOREAN paper is so strong and dense that it can be used to cover umbrellas.

YOU cannot vote at the Cape unless you can sign your name, and state your address and occupation in writing.

EIGHT million pounds' worth of fish are landed at English ports every twelve months. This includes shellfish, but not salmon.

THE rude beginnings of the passenger lift are said to date back to the seventeenth century, when they were used in Paris.

A TWENTIETH of Scotland's area is forest-land, seven-tenths is mountain, heath, and lake, and only one quarter cultivated land.

THE Tax of Russia's soil consists of 173 persons, of whom seventy-three are general and seventy-six extra aides-de-camp.

AN Italian electrician has invented an electric cartridge, which he offers as a substitute for dynamite and smokeless powder in mines, rock blasting, and for heavy ordnance.

CYCLONE or general storms may be 1,000 miles in diameter. Hurricanes operate on a path averaging 600 to 800 miles wide. Tornadoes are much smaller. They may be a mile wide at the top, and but a few feet at the bottom, but they are much more dangerous than either a cyclone or a hurricane.

EAGLE HAWKS are very destructive in Australia, particularly in the west, and a reward of two shillings is offered by the Government for every one destroyed, the claimant having to produce to a justice of the peace the head and talons, which are then to be entirely destroyed in his presence.

IN GENEVA glass refuse is pressed into paving blocks under a new invention that has recently been put into operation. Several streets have already been paved with this new contrivance, and give great satisfaction, not only in appearance, but also in durability. Several other cities in Europe have adopted the invention.

ONE hundred and twenty miles of underground telegraph cable, laid at a cost of £150,000, now connect London and Birmingham. Thus much serious interruption to business caused by exposure of the wires to storms will be avoided. In due time the connection will probably be extended to Manchester and Liverpool.

THE speed of the homing pigeon depends enormously on atmospheric influences. For instance, in very favourable weather with a strong wind behind the birds, they have flown in races on the Continent at the remarkable speed of 2,301 yards per minute, but in the face of a contrary wind the speed is generally reduced to about 880 yards per minute.

IN South Carolina there is a tea farm where it is said that a very high grade of tea can be and is grown; indeed, we are told that the tea raised there is now selling in the American market on its merits at the price of a dollar a pound, which is a higher price than most of the Chinese tea commands in the same market. To raise the leaf in this country requires special care and study and highly trained skill in curing, and that is the reason why the crop is not more generally tried in those portions of the south where the soil is favourable.

THE smoke from a candle-wick, after the candle is extinguished, is poisonous, and breathing it in quantity would cause death. A medical journal mentions a case of a company of carousers who tricked a boy, sleeping in the corner of a room, by one of their number holding to the boy's nose the smoke of a blown-out candle. After half an hour the boy fell into short breathing, trembling, cramps, and died in three days. The composition of this smoke is carburetted hydrogen, carbonic oxide, acrolein, &c. No burning wick should be left to poison the air of a room.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

E. C.—It must be equally divided.

NINA.—Blue coral is but rarely found.

M. L.—Not without consent of widow.

LIZ.—It was not a Queen Eleanor cross.

S. F.—Dudley town is in Worcestershire.

LAD.—It is a mere question of sentiment.

FRED.—You might write to the Chief of Police.

FORBES.—Marriage at a registrar's office is perfectly legal.

L. F.—Unless you agreed to pay the fare you are not liable.

ACE.—You must use your own judgment as to the amount.

WOMAN.—You must return it; cannot advise you otherwise.

TOM.—The second Home Rule Bill was rejected by the House of Lords.

ELIZ.—No; but you can enter into an agreement by mutual consent.

ADMINER.—The place of birth is not mentioned in any of his biographies.

AMOUR.—No; but you can compel the landlord to put them in order.

ISIDORE.—It is not lawful for a man to marry his deceased wife's sister.

ALAN.—No; the best way to learn the duties is to get a subordinate position.

A. C.—Anyone who defaces the current coin of the realm is liable to a penalty.

NINA.—We know of no way to remove them, except to leave worse scars behind.

MABEL.—Your late husband's furniture is yours, if he did not leave it to anyone else.

QUEST.—Charles Kemble was born in November, 1775, and died November 12th, 1854.

E. B.—A marriage between a man and his wife's niece could not be recognised at law.

LOCAL SERVICE.—Spton Kop was captured on January 22nd; British force withdrawn on 24th.

LAURA.—A girl must be thirteen years old or have passed the sixth standard before leaving school.

QUEST.—The sunniest October on record was in 1891. There were 112 hours of bright sunshine.

K. T.—They would be worth a considerable sum, but only an expert on seeing the picture, could say what.

A. J.—The bridesmaid stands during the wedding-ceremony, at the left of the bride, and a little in the rear.

A. R.—It does not grow in the form you buy it at the grocer's, but is made from a dough of fine wheat flour.

S. O.—We know of nothing but washing well with soap and water, and stiffening with a little white glue water.

G. R.—English people pay duty on chocolate, cocoa, and dried fruits, besides tea, coffee, tobacco, wine, and spirits.

HEAT.—There are excellent books on the subject, but it is against our rules to recommend any one in particular.

MAKER.—There are many "mere amateurs" on the stage as you say, but had you not better stick to the counter?

J. B. C.—The Jirikaba is a Japanese vehicle, a sort of two-wheeled perambulator drawn by a man who runs between the shafts.

CLAUDE DEVAL.—Highway means in law all roads to which the public have access, whether cart, carriage, horse, or foot ways.

QUEST.—We are unable to say, as you have not said which of the six Australian colonies your relative resided in at time of death.

C. C.—You can obtain particulars of Government examinations by applying to the Civil Service Commission, Cannon-row, Westminster, S.W.

JOTCA.—If the end of each stalk is cut off, and the vegetables then allowed to soak in cold salt-and-water for a few hours, they will revive wonderfully.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—There are three principal religions in China—Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. The latter is almost without forms and ceremonies.

MARK.—A man must first acquire a mate's certificate before he passes as master, consequently when the superior certificate is suspended he sails upon the inferior one.

TRICKER.—The instrument used by those who destroy superfluous hairs is an electrical needle, safe only in the hands of an expert; we could not say where you are likely to get one.

WANTS TO KNOW.—Yours is such an intricate question, and one of such importance, that we do not like the responsibility of advising you. You had better obtain the opinion of a respectable solicitor.

CLARENCE.—When a British subject has become naturalised in the States, it is necessary that he should once more be naturalised in this country before he can resume full political rights here.

A. C.—In event of the father dying intestate, all he possesses must be divided among his children, married and single alike, but he can by will divide a half to certain of the family if he thinks fit.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—The name "Adam's apple" had its origin in an ancient superstition that when Adam was eating the forbidden fruit a piece of it lodged in his throat, causing the swelling there seen.

VERY TROUBLED.—You must make every effort to find him. If you cannot, you marry again at your own risk. If he is alive, the marriage is null and void and any children illegitimate, but you will not be prosecuted for bigamy.

HAL.—It is proper for a young man, while escorting a lady along a lonely road, to offer her his arm. It is also correct for him to do so at night, no matter where they may be, on a lonely country road, or on a city street.

FLORENCE.—To clean porcelain saucepans, fill the pans half full of hot water, and add to it a tablespoonful of powdered borax, letting it boil for half-an-hour. If this does not remove all stains, scour well with a cloth, rubbed with soap and borax.

HEATHER.—Peel the marrow and put them into a saucepan of boiling water and salt. When tender take them out, cut them into quarters if large, if not halve them. Serve them in a vegetable dish on toast, with a teaspoon of butter sent to table with them.

MAY.—A tablespoonful of black pepper put into the first water in which grey and buff linens are washed will keep them from spotting. It will also generally keep the colours of black or coloured cambrics or muslins from running, and does not harden the water.

QUESTION AND ANSWER.

"You rhyme in praise of my golden hair;
Ah, but the gold will turn to gray.
You vow that no maiden with me may compare;
Yes, but the spring-time will pass away."

"Though my eyes be blue as the deep blue sea,
Blue eyes can fade through the mist of years;
What if the end of your rhyme should be
Blistered and spott'd with salt, and tears?"

"Then I must find rhymes for snow-white hair,
Dear, if the gold should turn to gray;
For never another with you may compare,
If on though the spring-time be passed away."

"If your eyes, now blue as the deep blue sea,
Should fade, beloved, through the mist of years,
What care I, so together we be;
Only, sweetheart, let me dry those tears."

EFFIE.—Ribbons and silks should be put away for preservation in brown paper; the chloride of lime used in manufacturing white paper frequently produces discoloration. A white satin dress should be pinned in blue paper, with brown paper outside, sewn together at the edges.

WORKING WOMAN.—If the rust has really eaten into the ironwork, as it generally has if the grate has been neglected long, it is impossible to remove the marks. Try rubbing it well over with soft blacked. Then leave for a day or two, and afterwards clean in the usual way.

WORKING MAN.—Read a good deal, which will give you a basis of information; and taking stand upon that you should be able to talk fairly well upon any current subject. To be a good speaker, it is necessary in first instance that you should be a good listener; model yourself upon others.

EMMA.—Carbolic acid is an excellent and cheap disinfectant. A solution of it should be poured down all sinks and drains once every week or fortnight during hot weather. To make this solution, allow ten ounces of liquid carbolic to three gallons of cold water. Use about half a pint for each pipe, and bottle the remainder for use as required.

FRANK.—It is desirable that you should serve, perhaps, a four-years' apprenticeship to mechanical engineering before going into an electrical shop; as regards admission to the latter, applicants are so numerous that premiums must in all cases be paid; this is insisted upon to check the rush of those desirous to become electrical engineers.

GRACE.—In order to keep the hair in the best condition the mode of arrangement should be changed occasionally for a short time to rest it. Hair arranged in the same manner month after month is apt to become thin. Partings should be frequently changed. If they are left in the same way without being done afresh every day they soon widen, and look neglected.

HARPER.—Take one pound of whiting or prepared chalk. Mix it to a smooth paste with cold water, and boil, stirring all the time. Dissolve a quarter of a pound of soap in a teaspoonful of boiling water, add to the whiting, and boil together to a smooth thick paste; pour into an earthen jar, and when cold it is ready to use. Apply with a soft cloth, and wash the silver in hot soap suds.

LIZ.—Turpentine applied freely to the places they are believed to infest is the best cure. Some good housekeepers steep brown paper in turpentine, and fasten it underneath all the furniture, whilst others put powdered bitter apples and pieces of camphor into the various corners of sofas, arm-chairs, &c. Things to be packed away should be sprinkled with insecticide, either apple, pepper or camphor, slightly done up in brown paper, carefully pasted down to leave no loophole for a wandering moth to creep in, and then rolled up in old sheets.

P. C.—"Bats desert a sinking ship" for two reasons: First, because the rushing of the water has driven them from their accustomed haunts; and second, because the lack of the usual supply of food may have compelled them to seek it elsewhere. Bats have been seen crawling along a bawser from the ship to the shore, but they could not have had a knowledge of a pending calamity to the vessel unless the water had already driven them from their nests. They have also been known to leave houses about to fall, from natural decay, but it was after human occupants had already deserted the habitations, and the rats followed their example when food had become exhausted.

H. F.—The Order of the Garter is one of the most celebrated and ancient of all military orders of knighthood in Europe, and was instituted by Edward the Third, of England. The origin of the order is ascribed to an incident which occurred at a ball at which the King and Joan Countess of Salisbury were partners in a dance. The Countess is said to have dropped her garter while dancing. Her royal partner picked it up, and diverted the attention of the guests by trying it around his own leg, saying, "Honi soit qui mal y pense." "Evil be to him who evil thinks"—which became the motto of the order which he soon afterwards instituted.

F. A.—Have plenty of boiling water ready, dissolve half pound of soda in half a gallon. Now pour about a gallon of the remainder of the boiling water down the pipe. This is to heat it and soften the decomposing matter, whatever it may be that causes the odour. Follow this at once, while the pipe is still hot, with the soda solution, and finally give it another flushing with boiling water. Then pour in a little disinfectant. All sinks should be well flushed with hot water after water containing grease has been poured into the pipes, as it is from the particles of grease that have been left clinging to the pipe that the unhealthy gases generally come.

F. A. R.—The barbers of the Middle Ages served the public also in the capacity of surgeons, and frequently performed the act of bleeding. In this operation a staff was held by the person who was to be bled, and bandages were of course necessary for binding the arm after bleeding. When the staff was not in use the bandage was tied on it, that both might be ready for use when wanted, and it was customary for barbers to hang the two together at their doors, as a sign where the very necessary surgeon could be found. At length instead of hanging out the staff used in the operation a pole was painted with stripes in imitation of the staff and bandage, and this was used as a sign. It is said that there was an ancient statute decreeing that barbers, when they pursued no other trade, were to use a blue and white pole, striped, but that when they also followed the profession of surgeon, they must use a red stripe also. The last barber surgeon of London is said to have died there in 1831.

HAROLD.—The Goths and Vandals were wild Germanic tribes that overran Europe from the second to the fifth century. When first known to the Romans, the Goths had settled along the Danube and the Alps; the Vandals were south of the Baltic sea. Both of these tribes pressed southward and invaded Italy, Spain, and Africa, making several attacks upon the city of Rome. The Romans were repeatedly defeated, and their temples stripped of their ornaments. The greatest leader of the Goths was Alaric, in the fifth century, who three times took Rome, and once sat upon the throne of a rival emperor to Honorius. The recognised chief of the Vandals was Genseric, who at the bidding of Eudoxia, wife of the murdered emperor, took Rome and gave the city up to be pillaged by his soldiers for fourteen days. At one time the Roman army was largely composed of Goths and Vandals, who, furnished with Roman arms, were well prepared to conquer their masters. The downfall of Rome in A.D. 476 was accomplished by the combined hosts of Huns, Goths, Vandals, Alemanni and Franks, and the spoil was divided between the conquerors.

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